

JERRY "THE BULL" MARTIN DIES AT 67

Obituary by John DiSanto /
PhillyBoxingHistory.com

When the news came that former Philadelphia fighter Jerry "The Bull" Martin had died on Thursday (11/04/21), it was a shock. Martin was 67 years old, just a few weeks shy of his 68th birthday. Those who watched him fight remember him as a tall and tough, strong and powerful contender who came very close to reaching the very top. From the late-1970s to the early-1980s, a prime Martin was one of the best light heavyweight contenders at a time when the 175-pound division was booming, especially in Philadelphia. Martin once gave Matthew Saad Muhammad a legitimate scare, in his second attempt at a world title, and defeated a number of excellent boxers during his time as a contender.

The Antigua-born fighter, who fought out of North Philadelphia throughout his eight-year career (1976 - 1984), earned three opportunities to become a world champion and won two regional belts while compiling a record of 25-7, 17 KOs.



Martin made his debut at the Arena with a first round knockout of 27-bout vet Sixto Martinez on February 25, 1976. He won 10 of his first 11 fights before making his first bit of noise in the division by beating Jerry Celestine at the Spectrum near the end of 1978. Celestine had issued Vonzell Johnson his first defeat and had gone the distance with Marvin Johnson. Martin's eight-round decision victory suggested that he had a real future.

Three fights later he stopped Brooklyn's Willie Taylor in eight rounds, also at the Spectrum. He followed this with a 12th-round TKO of Dale Grant at Steel Pier in Atlantic City to win the vacant NABF light heavyweight title. He added the USBA title with a 12-round points win over contender Jesse Burnett at the Spectrum on November 14, 1979. The noise he was making as a rising 175-pounder was getting louder.

Martin began 1980 with a TKO of Billy Douglas at the 69th Street Forum in Upper Darby, and the win set up a fight that would truly put Martin on the light heavyweight map.



Rahway State Prison inmate James Scott had proven himself to be a problem for all the top light heavyweights. Beginning in 1978, Scott had strung together eight impressive victories while behind bars in the New Jersey prison. Victories over Diego Robinson and Fred Brown went mostly unnoticed. However, Scott then defeated Eddie Mustafa Muhammad by 12-round decision and followed with a TKO of Richie Kates. At that time, Mustafa Muhammad and Kates were two of the best 175-pounders in the world.

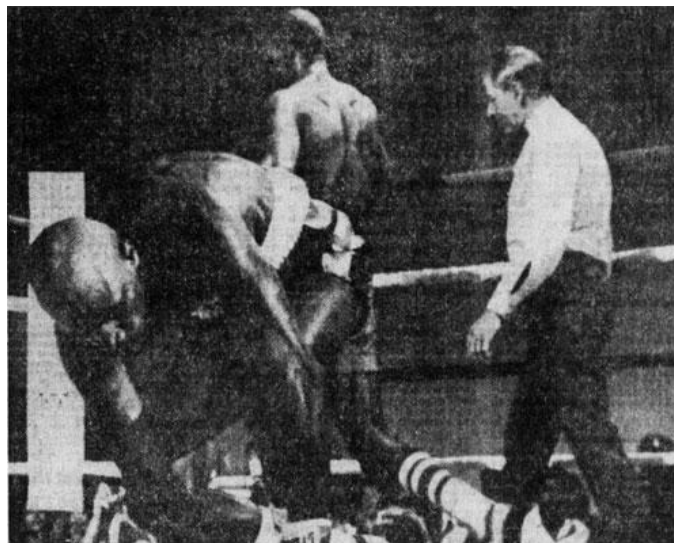
As Scott continued to add important names to his resume (Bunny Johnson, Ennio Cometti, Jerry Celestine, and Yaqui Lopez), he rose in the rankings and it became clear that one of the world champions might have to consider defending their crown against Scott in the ultimate away game. This included Mustafa Muhammad who had won the WBA title since losing to Scott. However, before things reached that point, Jerry Martin accepted a fight against Scott at Rahway.

On May 25, 1980, Martin faced Scott on national television, and dropped the rising contender twice en route to a 10-round unanimous decision victory. It was a huge win, the biggest of Martin's career thus far, and it earned him a shot at the world title.

Martin challenged Eddie Mustafa Muhammad for the WBA crown on July 20, 1980, at the Great Gorge Playboy Resort in McAfee, NJ. Mustafa Muhammad scored a 10th round TKO, but Martin still had plenty of life left in his career. He rebounded with three victories before landing another crack at a title.

On September 26, 1981, Martin challenged WBC champion and fellow-Philadelphian Matthew Saad Muhammad at the Golden Nugget in Atlantic City. Over the first several rounds, Martin was a true threat to the champion and gave every Saad Muhammad fan (myself included) many anxious moments. This was especially true in round ten when Martin was suddenly back in the hunt after Saad Muhammad had seemed to take control of the fight. During the round, he again had Matthew in serious trouble. However, true to form, the champion rallied and scored an 11th round TKO. Many felt the stoppage by referee Larry Hazzard was premature, but Saad fans were relieved.

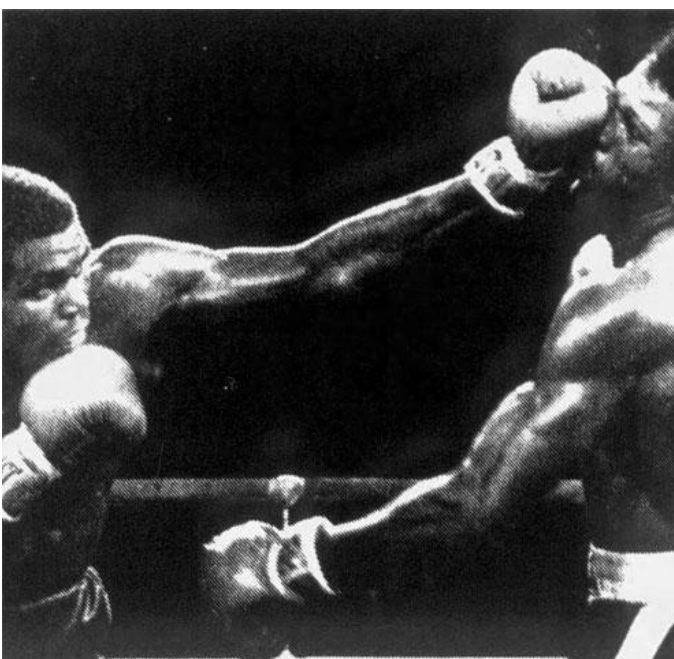
On the strength of his performance against Saad Muhammad, Martin's next fight was another title shot on March 21, 1982 in Las Vegas. This time, the opportunity came against Dwight Muhammad Qawi, who had dethroned Saad at the end of 1981. Martin



James Scott staggers back to his feet as his opponent, Jerry "Bull" Martin, is directed to a neutral corner Sunday at Rahway State Prison. Scott, who was undefeated and was ranked number one by the WBA before his imprisonment, lost the decision. (UPI Telephoto)

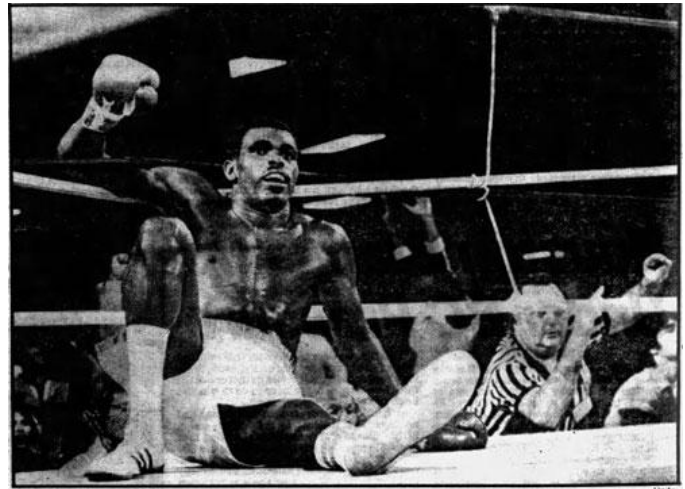


Eddie Mustafa Muhammad spent yesterday slamming hard rights like this one into Jerry Martin's head



lost the challenge by TKO in round six. After the fight, Qawi said, "I hit this man with stuff that would have put a hole through a brick wall. Then I saw him getting up, and I thought, 'What am I in for?'"

Martin fought six more times, beating Rick Jester (TKO7), Willie Torres (TKO1), and Anthony Witherspoon (W10), and losing to Johnny Davis and Richie Kates. Finally, when Martin lost to Prince Mama Mohammed (L10) on April 10, 1984, he retired from the ring.



Jerry Martin wears a glazed look after Dwight Braxton knocked him to the canvas in the second round

Martin made 14 appearances in Philadelphia during his career: eight times at the Spectrum, three times at the Blue Horizon, two times at the Arena, and once at the Civic Center (Convention Hall). He also made eight starts in Atlantic City and one in London. His fine record of 25-7, 17 KOs, looks better and better the closer you look at the names it contains. Martin fought many of the best light heavyweights during one of the toughest eras in history. And during his prime, he only lost to the very best.

After his career ended, Martin occasionally attended local fights, and was always friendly, greeting fans with his ever-present broad smile. In 2011, Martin was inducted into the Pennsylvania Boxing Hall of Fame along with his old rival Richie Kates. Also in attendance that night were Matthew Saad Muhammad and Mike Rossman. A photo taken on that occasion looks like a light heavyweight Mt. Rushmore.



Martin's boxing legacy extends into the present day as his son, James Martin, a 7-3 junior middleweight prospect, climbs the ranks himself.

No funeral service arrangements had been announced at the time of this writing.