

Holly Mims: The Spoiler

By Dan Cuoco

During his 19-year career, Holly Mims had to scratch for fights because he wasn't a big puncher or colorful enough to attract a national fan base. Over thirty-seven percent of the fights he engaged in were decided by a split, majority decision, or a draw. Established fighters and fighters on the way up were wary of his skill set because he was known in the business as a spoiler.

Newspapers and ring record books generally listed Mims as being born in 1929. However, the United States Social Security Death Index states that Mims—listed as H.R. Mims—was born on February 10, 1927. Holly died on January 13, 1970, of a kidney ailment. He was 42 years old and survived by his wife, Claire, son Clinton, and daughter Theresa.



Holly turned professional at age 21 on June 1, 1948, and engaged in his last professional fight at age 40 on July 6, 1967, with a ring record of 68-28-6 (KO 13/TKO by 1). The durable Mims was stopped only once in his career: Joe Louis Adair stopped him on a cut resulting from a head butt on May 13, 1964. Under modern rules, bouts stopped due to head butts are no longer designated as a technical knockout.

Between February 1952 and June 1960, Mims was ranked as high as the number two middleweight in the world by *Ring* magazine. Among the boxers Mims faced during his 19-year pro career were Sugar Ray Robinson, Johnny Bratton, Bobby Dykes, Rocky Castellani, Bobby Boyd, Spider Webb, Joey Giardello, George Benton, Henry Hank, Rudell Stitch, Dick Tiger, Jimmy Ellis, Rubin "Hurricane" Carter, Emile Griffith, Joey Archer, and Luis Manuel Rodriguez.

Boxing historian Mike Casey described Mims' style as follows:

"A stand-up boxer with guile, toughness, and a versatile box of tricks, Mims could box and fight and handle any situation. He was adept at picking off opponents' punches with apparent ease and his sense of anticipation rivalled that of a top chess player. Fluid of movement, Holly could box traditionally or slug when slugging was required. Many an opponent had a rude awakening when he forced Mims to the ropes or into a corner. With his long arms, which he used to maximum effect, Mims would lash back with a volley of punches that left the aggressor stunned. Holly loved the ropes, springing from their haven as an octopus springs from its lair. Mims held his left hand low, teasing his opponents to move into him. Many a puncher grabbed the tempting invitation, like a fish chomping at the angler's bait, but Mims was a hub of constant and slippery movement and incredibly difficult to hit cleanly. His excellent head movement was consistently confusing to his opponents and he took a punch well when he had to, barely reacting to it."

Highlighting Some of Mims' Highs and Lows

1950-11-06 (Johnny Bratton, W UD 10) Mims, a 4-1 underdog, won a unanimous decision over Bratton after one of the hardest fights seen in Baltimore in years. The two well-conditioned fighters stood toe-to-toe and slugged each other most of the way. Mims pulled away in the last two rounds to clinch the victory.

1950-11-27 (Johnny Bratton, W UD 10) Mims took command of the fight in the first round, staggering Bratton with a right to the jaw. Bratton rallied in the third round, pushing Mims around the ring with a two-fisted attack. But Mims came back and won the next four rounds with hard body blows and stiff left hooks to the face. Bratton threw punches wildly in the last two rounds, trying for a knockout. But Mims stayed in close and held on to his lead.

1951-01-21 (Jose Basora, W RTD 8) As early as the first round, Mims demonstrated that Basora's superior size and poundage would be no help to him. Mims dropped the plodding Basora for an eight count in the first round with a blistering left hook and a right to the head. Through the fourth, fifth, and sixth, Holly's straight rights to the jaw had Basora tipsy, and Basora's right eye was moused in the fifth, then cut and closed to a mere slit. Basora was cut to proverbial red ribbons in the seventh and eighth when Mims brought up cuffing rights on the inside. Basora's plight was beyond hope, so his cornerman asked the fight to be stopped.

1951-04-01 (Sugar Ray Robinson, L UD 10) Sugar Ray Robinson pounded out a 10-round unanimous decision over tough and aggressive Holly Mims of Washington, DC, in his first fight since winning the middleweight championship. Mims, who had to drink several glasses of water at the weighing-in ceremonies to come in over the 160-pound limit, opened an old cut over Robinson's left eye in the first round and surprised the champion several times by coming out of a crouch and scoring with lefts and rights to the jaw. Ray scored his only knockdown in the second round with a right and left to the head, but Mims was not seriously damaged. Mims was the aggressor most of the way.



(Pic. Robinson vs Mims)

1952-01-10 (George Benton, L UD 8) Geogie Benton upset Holly Mims by unanimous decision before 2,152 fans. Judges Lou Tress and Jack Styles voted 4-3-1, and referee Pete Tomasco 6-1-1 for Benton. Benton started with looping left hooks but found trouble landing the same blows in the second round. In the fourth, Mims twice jolted Benton with solid rights to the head. In the sixth, Benton held and hit Mims with right uppercuts and tied them up after the blows. Benton followed soft lefts in the seventh with hard rights to the head.

1952-11-18 (Lester Felton W UD 10) Mims lost ground early in the fight, as Felton worked well with his left jab and kept Holly at a distance. However, Mims fought his way in close several times with powerful shots to the body and ribs. The body punishment took its toll on Felton, who began to slow down considerably during the second half of the fight. In the eighth, Mims changed his strategy, opened up, and started consistently catching Felton with overhand rights. The decision in Mims' favor was a mere formality.

1953-03-04 (Willie Troy, W KO 8) Holly Mims really deserves his title of spoiler. The Washington middleweight did it again when he upset here-to-fore unbeaten Willie Troy, Washington. Mims left no doubt about the verdict. He knocked out the lanky Troy with a sharp right to the chin at 2:59 of the eighth round. Troy had been a 7-to-5 favorite to win his 20th straight fight. From now on, Mims may find it tougher than ever to get fights. Ever since he beat Johnny Bratton twice in 1950 and gave Sugar Ray Robinson a good battle in 1951, Mims has had trouble finding opponents. He managed to get only five fights last year, and last night's bout was the first since his upset triumph over Lester Felton in November.

It was an outstanding fight throughout, and on two of the scorecards, Troy was ahead going into the eighth. Both fighters gave out punishment, and there were few clinches. The advancing, long-armed Troy usually caught Mims once or twice a round on the ropes or in a corner, and when he did catch him, he found a tiger. Mims was willing and able to fight his way out of these holes, and those flurries along the ropes gave the crowd a great treat. The end came with surprising suddenness late in the eighth round. Troy caught Mims in Troy's corner and pounded him almost to the floor. But Mims fought back and caught Troy with a sharp left hook, followed by a solid, well-aimed right to the jaw. Troy collapsed and couldn't quite make it by the count of ten. Referee Ray Bowen's count of ten and the bell ending the round came practically together, and many customers thought the bell had saved Troy. The official time was 2:59; however, only one second before the round ended.

1954-05-05 (Georgie Johnson, W KO 9) What Mims did to Johnson was one of the most skillful boxing demonstrations seen in the Baltimore Coliseum in many a night. Mims set his man up for a spectacular finish by displaying a stiff left jab in the early rounds. The end came one second before the bell would have ended the ninth after Mims had spent most of the round luring Johnson into taking the lead and pinning Mims against the ropes. Mims straightened him with a stiff right uppercut, followed with a crossing left hook, and draped him over the lower rope with a triphammer overhand right, where Johnson took the full count. Until then, Mims had toyed with Johnson, who had won 27 of 30 previous bouts, 21 by knockout.

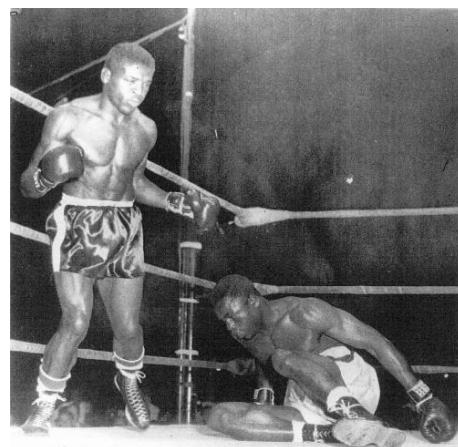
1954-06-30 (Bobby Dykes, D 10) Middleweights Holly Mims and Bobby Dykes, both seeking a shot at Bobo Olson's crown, see-sawed their way Wednesday night to a 10-round draw. Mims, Washington, D.C., looked strong in the middle rounds when he jarred Dykes with overhand rights. Dykes, Miami, Fla., piled up a big lead in the early rounds by flicking lefts and rights at Mims, then making Mims come after him. There were no knockdowns.

1955-01-12 (Rocky Castellani, L UD 12) Rocky Castellani, who lost a title challenge to champion Bobo Olson in August, won a unanimous decision over 3rd ranked Holly Mims of Washington, D.C., at the Cleveland Arena in a 12-round bout that was advertised as an 'elimination' to determine a challenger. Castellani, ranked 2nd among contenders, won by a fair margin Wednesday night, but he did his challenger's cause little good by using his regular hit-and-hold tactics after he had promised to come in with a new 'tiger technique.' It was a dull bout in which Rocky registered the only knockdown, dropping Mims with a left hook to the chin in the 8th round.



(Pic. Castellani vs Mims)

1955-05-25 (Charley Green, W UD 10) The counter-punching Holly Mims of Washington floored Charley Green of Los Angeles in the 1st round last night and then withstood a 9th-round knockdown to win a unanimous decision in their 10-round bout at the St. Louis Arena. Mims caught Green with a left hook in the 1st round, and the West Coast fighter took an eight count. Green, whose nose started bleeding in the 5th, then put on a hot rally in the 9th that sent Mims sprawling through the ropes for a nine count. But Mims came back to win the last round on all three official cards.



(Pic. Mims drops Green)

1956-04-18 (Bobby Boyd, L SD 10) Bobby Boyd won his 10th straight fight last night with a split decision over Holly Mims in the Chicago Stadium. But it was an uphill battle after Mims counter-punched his way to an early lead. Mims started the bout in a similar fashion, driving right and left hooks over Boyd's guard to pile up points. But he tired after the 5th round and went to the canvas in the 6th when Boyd landed a right-left combination. Mims' second, Jimmy Dudley, and manager Nick Trotta complained that it was no knockdown and that Mims won the fight. 'He was pushed down,' Dudley said, while Trotta complained that 'he was ducking away and slipped when a punch shoved him. Post-fight comment: "He's the toughest guy I ever fought. He could beat Eduardo Lause, George Johnson, and Gene Fullmer all in one night." -Bobby Boyd

1956-07-18 (Spider Webb, L UD 10) Ellsworth (Spider) Webb, an 11-5 underdog making his first 10-round start, scored a unanimous decision over experienced Holly Mims of Washington, D.C., Wednesday night in a dull televised bout in the Chicago Stadium. Just two months out of the Army, Webb was the favorite on all scoring cards as he slapped Mims almost at will and got little punishment in return except in the early rounds.

1958-01-22 (Bobby Boyd, D 10) Chicago's Bobby Boyd and ringwise Holly Mims of Washington battled to a 10-round draw tonight. Boyd was floored for the mandatory 8-count in the 8th round. Mims, fighting for the first time since last April 19, came on strong in the later rounds and was sharper with the few punches he landed. The veteran of 10 years of ring warfare frequently tied up the younger Boyd but couldn't find the companion of the hard right to the jaw that sent Boyd to the canvas midway in the 8th. Boyd started fast, but his lefts and rights lacked authority, and Mims drew blood to the Chicagoan's left eye in the 2nd round.

1958-03-12 (Spider Webb, W UD 10) Holly Mims smashed touted highly Spider Webb to the canvas to score a unanimous, upset 10-round decision before 4,500 Coliseum fans. There wasn't a dull moment in the nationally televised fight. And Mims made good his boast that he would lick the 3rd ranked Webb and thus regain national recognition. The climax came midway in the 6th round when Webb crashed to the canvas under a vicious right-left combination. However, he was immediately on his knees and took a nine count. Mims forced most of the action. But except for the knockdown, Webb weathered the storm each time and frequently countered in close infighting. Mims suffered a puffed right eye in the fracas but was otherwise unmarked.

1959-05-06 (Joey Giardello, L SD 10) Joey Giardello, blood gushing from a slashed face, thrust himself into the middleweight sweepstakes Wednesday night with a heroic finish that gained him a 10-round split decision over Holly Mims. Giardello rallied from a beating in the 8th round and won the verdict in the nationally televised slugfest. Mims opened a slight cut over Giardello's left eye in the 1st but really tore a gash on the right side of Joey's face in the furious 8th. A left-right hurt Giardello early in the session, and a jolting left buckled him near the end. But Giardello, who had to win to stay in the running for the middleweight title stripped from Ray Robinson by the NBA, held off Mims in the 9th and won the chips-down 10th on all three cards.

1959-07-15 (George Benton, W UD 10) Using his familiar inside tactics, veteran middleweight Holly Mims carved out a unanimous decision over George Benton in a nationally televised 10-round fight. Mims outclassed his younger opponent with a close-in aggressive body attack and good combinations. He staggered Benton with a left-right flurry midway through the 7th round and pressed his foe throughout. Mims forced Benton to fight his style throughout the contest. Only in the 10th did Benton succeed in scoring with stiff punches from long range.



(Pic. Benton vs Mims)

1959-08-10 (Henry Hank, W SD 10) Holly Mims justified his 8-5 favorite role by taking a hard-fought 10-round split decision from Henry Hank. An enthusiastic 8,300 fans applauded both fighters at the final bell. Hank opened fast and backed Mims into the ropes, shooting left hooks and rights to the face to take the first three rounds. The fourth and fifth rounds were fought on even terms, both fighters banging away at each other at close quarters. Mims began in the last five pounds to pound Hank with stiff left hands to the face and good rights to the midsection as Hank pressed in. In the seventh, Mims caught his opponent with a tremendous left hook, which shook Hank. He kept the pressure on for the rest of the fight.

1959-10-12 (Henry Hank, L MD 12) Henry Hank kept his record intact of never losing a rematch as he gained a 12-round unanimous decision over highly-ranked Holly Mims. Hank piled up an early lead and put on one of his famous blitz finishes for the upset win. Hank won the first four rounds before Mims could get started. In the fifth, Mims moved in, began scoring with lefts and rights, and had Hank with his back to the ropes. Mims won the fifth, seventh, ninth, and 10th rounds, while Hank fought him even in the sixth and eighth. Hank rallied in the final two rounds and succeeded in closing Mims' left eye.

1959-12-30 (Dick Tiger, L MD 10) Dick Tiger, British Empire middleweight champion, kept the pressure on Holly Mims in hammering out a 10-round decision in Chicago Stadium. Tiger frequently missed with his most potent weapon, a left hook, but kept Mims against the ropes most of the time. Mims was at his best coming off the ropes and constantly made Tiger break off the exchanges. But Tiger proved much stronger and got in the harder licks as he kept stalking Mims.

1961-05-24 (Gomeo Brennan, W UD 12) Gomeo Brennan shouldn't feel too bad because the learning he was forced to absorb would be an education even for Leonard Bernstein. Maneuvering his left elbow in close with all the artistry of a southpaw symphony conductor and all the persistence of a left-handed bar-fly, Holly Mims, the wise and mellow middleweight from Washington, D.C., outpointed the young Bimini belter in an excellent 12-round fight last night at the Beach Auditorium. "There ain't no young fighter livin' who can cope with Holly inside," proclaimed trainer George Johnson in Holly's dressing room. "He's the smartest in the business. He uses that elbow to push you away in close and then hits you with the right. He confuses a young fighter in close." Mims quickly convinced the skeptics among the crowd of 1,883 that he still has a lot left and had been undersold in the betting. Mims forced the fight all the way, but so long as Brennan moved away, throwing left jabs and occasionally countering with right crosses, he was able to keep the fight close. He wasn't too far behind at the end of seven and, in the fifth, crossing a right seemed to wobble Holly. But the cagey Mims grappled and cuffed Gomeo around close to recover from these blows, and never did Gomeo have an advantage. From the eighth on, Mims stayed in close, and it was his all the rest of the way.

1961-11-29 (Jimmy Ellis, W UD 10) A sharp, busy, body-banging Holly Mims was too much for young Jimmy Ellis. But Ellis, losing his first pro bout of six, gave a good account of himself against the talented veteran. Although Ellis lost by unanimous decision, the voting was close. Mims got the better of Ellis in the in-fighting of a roughly contested, hard fight, with the referee repeatedly warning both for holding and elbowing. The tenth round was a fierce one. The appreciative crowd gave both fighters a standing ovation. The win was Mims' eighth consecutive since he dropped a decision to Dick Tiger in December 1959.

1962-05-04 (Jimmy Ellis, L UD 10) Jimmy Ellis used his height and head to win a unanimous decision over old pro Holly Mims. The 22-year-old middleweight thus avenged the only defeat on his boxing record- a unanimous decision loss to the 35-year-old Mims. At 6'1 ½, Ellis had an advantage reach over the 5'7 Mims. Ellis utilized this advantage by boxing at long range and using left jabs, with occasional right hands. Referee Don Asbury commented that Ellis "fought a very intelligent fight." Ellis elected to box Mims instead of punching it out with him in close quarters as he did when they last met.

1962-12-22 (Rubin Carter, L UD 10) Rubin (Hurricane) Carter stormed back from a fourth-round knockdown to take a unanimous decision from veteran Holly Mims in a nationally televised bout at Madison Square Garden. Mims, a last-minute substitute, arrived in New York less than 4 hours before the fight. However, the clever veteran gave a good account of himself, scoring the only knockdown of the bout in the fourth round and finishing with a flourish that earned him an "even" vote on two official scorecards in the last round. The muscular slugger kept the pressure on Mims all the way, hoping to score his fourth straight knockout. However, Mims stayed out of trouble, except in the eighth when a Carter left hook had him wobbly for a few seconds. In the fourth, as the aggressive Carter pressed his attack, Mims suddenly uncorked a short right to the jaw, dropping Carter to one knee for a count of two. Mims got in another hard right to the jaw before the round ended, but after that, Carter's clubbing lefts kept the 33-year-old veteran back peddling for the remainder of the fight.



(Pic. Mims vs Carter)

1963-08-10 (Emile Griffith, L UD 10) Welterweight champion Emile Griffith forced middleweight contender Holly Mims around the ring Saturday night with left jabs and overhand rights and won a unanimous decision in their nationally televised non-title 10-round fight. Griffith, making his first start since regaining the 147-pound crown, coupled his forcing tactics with a body attack in a fight that drew cheers from the 4,000 in Convention Hall. Griffith, age 25, made certain that he gave Mims, age 36, very little punching room.

1964-02-07 (Joey Archer, L SD 10) Contender Joey Archer barely beat aging Holly Mims on an unpopular split 10-round decision at Madison Square Garden. Archer, who said he was sluggish because of a week-long cold, was almost floored in the third when he was nailed by a left and right to the jaw. Mims missed a follow-up left hook that might have ended the fight right there. After trailing for the first half of the fight, Archer rallied and pulled out the verdict by winning the last round from the tiring old-timer. Holly talked to the reporters after the fight, stating: "My plan was to outbox him when he wanted to box, outfight him when he wanted to fight. Do everything he did...only Better! Seems to me I did it." The crowd of about 3,000 hooted the split decision, hurling paper cups, cigar butts, and peanut shells into the ring. *A poll of 14 boxing writers had 8 scoring it for Mims, five scoring for Archer, and 1 calling it a draw.*



(Pic. Archer vs Mims)

1964-03-20 (Luis Rodriguez, L UD 10) Luis Rodriguez substituted for Joey Archer on ten days' notice. Mims appeared to win the first two rounds, with strong punching in close, as Rodriguez did little. Rodriguez, though, took control in the third round, as he began to beat Mims to the punch regularly, a pattern he would maintain through the remainder of the contest. Rodriguez was just too fast and shifty for his 37-year-old opponent. There were no knockdowns, although Luis had his aging foe in distress in the 4th and 5th rounds, with his blazing barrages to the body and head.

1964-05-13 (Joe Louis Adair, L TKO 6) The 5th round was a couple of minutes old when their heads collided with such a thud that could be heard in the back row. At the bell, Mims went to his corner with blood gushing from a gaping slice over his left eye. Ring Physician William Cassio examined the wound but allowed the fight to continue. Adair lost no time in the 6th in pounding across a right that started blood to dip anew down Mims' face. Referee Paul Cavalier, who had the bout even (2-2-1), lost no time and called the fight off.

1967-07-06 (Georgie Johnson, W SD 10) Holly Mims extended his winning streak to six after his loss to Joe Louis Adair with a ten-round split decision over old rival Georgie Johnson at the Portland Exposition Building in Maine. Holly made the most of a five-inch reach advantage in scoring a 10-round split decision win over Johnson in a boxing classic. Mims, who knocked out Johnson 13 years ago in Baltimore, won by single-point margins of 96-95 on the cards of judges Sid Schwartz and Leo Pererleau, and Johnson was the 98-96 choice of Russell Leonard. The Portland Maine Press Herald saw it 98-96 for Mims.

Holly and George and the Expo crowd of more than 1,500 loved every minute of it. Appreciative applause began with 90 seconds to go in the final round and continued long after the cessation of action. The only knockdown registered was by Johnson in round one. Johnson crossed a right-hand punch over a Mims jab and sent the veteran wobbly-legged. He sagged toward the canvas, grabbing Johnson's legs, and referee Pete Bennett was about to start counting when the bell sounded. From that point on, Mims, age 40, was understandably wary of 37-year-old Ol' George's right, but his reach advantage enabled him to score long left jabs and follow with telling rights to the head. This was Holly's last professional fight.

After retiring from boxing, Mims worked at various jobs. He managed a theatre, worked as a custodian, and periodically worked with amateur boxers.