

Ronnie Harris: Quality and heart

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THIS IS HOW I want to remember Ronnie Harris: It was a night in late March of 1972 when a fighter's heart won a bout that should have been lost.

Until about the seventh round of a bout with Raoul Soriano, a tough Mexican ranked among the world's top 10 welterweights, Harris had been taking a pounding. Harris' eyes were puffy and beginning to close when he anchored himself in the center of the ring and began stabbing his machine gun left jab in Soriano's face. One left. Two lefts. A dozen lefts. He didn't miss a shot.

Between rounds, Blue Lewis, a Detroit heavyweight who trained with Harris, jumped from his ring-side seat in the Community Arts Auditorium at the State Fair Grounds and flashed a roll of bills at the crowd.

"I takes Ron Harris," Lewis belatedly, waving a finger from row to row, looking for takers. There were none.

THE LAST THREE rounds were



BOXER RONNIE HARRIS

"I've never seen a guy who had so much heart. I don't think Ronnie knew the meaning of fear."

HARRIS WAS NEVER off his feet in his pro career. He retired in 1973 after a loss to unranked Arturo

mayhem, with Harris landing lefts and straight rights — enough of both to win a close decision. Harris heard the decision, then collapsed in his corner, a winner.

That's the way I'll remember Ronnie Harris, as a rough and rugged winner.

There were some present that night who still swear the Soriano-Harris bout was the best fight they ever saw. Ronnie Harris impressed a lot of people that way. He did a lot of things like nobody else — the way he fought, the way he lived. Regretably, the way he died.

Harris was killed at 10 p.m. on New Year's Eve. Harris was shot and robbed in the driveway of a home at 19758 Edinborough in Detroit's northwest section. Police say the house belongs to an acquaintance of Harris, who was dead on arrival at Mt. Carmel Hospital. He was 33.

The funeral was to be this morning in Ebenezer Baptist Church in Detroit.

HARRIS' BOXING CAREER WAS TOO

Zuniga: It was only the third loss against 30 victories and one draw. At one point Harris was ranked No. 7 by Ring Magazine in the welterweight division. For most of his career Harris was trained by Detroit's Taylor Smith. Luther Burgess, also from Detroit, trained him briefly.

At 5 feet 6 he should have been a lightweight. He soon outgrew the 135-pound division and moved up to the welterweight class, where he looked up to all of his opponents — and never backed down an inch. Harris was anything you wanted in the ring, puncher, boxer, tactician.

Outside the ring Harris was an engaging personality. He lived well, enjoying the high life. He wore fine clothes and drove expensive automobiles. —65—
Few things fazed him.

HE ONCE FELL asleep driving home and wrecked his car. Undaunted, Harris went back to sleep, figuring he'd deal with the situation later that morning.

short and far too obscure for the quality he brought to the ring. He was a craftsman who fought beyond all obligation to the science of boxing. He could paint a picture on his opponent's face with a left jab, and you couldn't hit him with a handful of rice — unless Ronnie decided it was time to put his head on somebody's chest and see how much heart he had. More often than not, it wasn't enough.

At the age of 16, Harris won a bronze medal in the 1964 Olympic Games in the 132-pound division. He was a teammate of former heavyweight champion Joe Frazier, a gold medalist that year.

"I thought at that time I had never seen a finer fighting machine than the Ronnie Harris of 1964," said Emanuel Steward, trainer of world champions Tommy Hearns and Hilmer Kenty who fought with Harris in the amateur ranks. "And this is coming from one of his teammates, the hardest people to please because of the competition.

When the police knocked on the car window he casually rolled over and locked the door.

Harris became a personal friend. An early lesson learned was not to expect to be home early. It wasn't uncommon for Ronnie to call at 2 a.m.

"You doin' anything?" he'd ask.

Harris was involved in another shooting in 1974. He was shot four times by robbers. He was hospitalized for more than a week.

WHEN THE NURSES told him of his impending discharge, Harris called a tailor, who measured him for a new suit. It would have been unlike Harris not to leave in style.

There is something almost magic about the life of most fighters, for their's is a unique profession — what they represent in the ring and what they carry from it to those outside.

Ronnie Harris was one of those with the magic, especially on that night in March when Blue Lewis couldn't find a taker to bet against his heart.