

A Statue For Boxing Great Larry Holmes

By **Alexander Baron** - Sep 15, 2015



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What does the phrase heavyweight boxing conjure up for you? Probably some of the great champions: Mike Tyson (before he disgraced himself); Muhammad Ali – The Greatest; and for those with a sense of history, Rocky Marciano and Joe Louis. One name the non-boxing fraternity is likely to overlook nowadays is that of Larry Holmes, even though he was heavyweight champion for seven years, and but for taking on his final opponent – Father Time – he would have finished his career unbeaten.

His other mistake was not of his own making, he was born nearly eight years after Muhammad Ali, and lived in his shadow. Now he will finally be stepping out of that shadow when on November 3, his sixty-sixth birthday, a 9 foot bronze statue of the man **will be dedicated** in his hometown of Easton, Pennsylvania.

The Larry Holmes story is a classic boxing tale, if not exactly rags to riches then one of character rather than talent. Not that he was lacking in talent, but unlike Ali, who was guided by a business syndicate, or Tyson who was mentored throughout his early career, the Easton Assassin had no easy road. The fourth of twelve siblings, he did real jobs after dropping out of high school, taking up boxing at the relatively late age of 19. After turning pro, he worked as a sparring partner, including for Ali, and after five years got a title shot, winning a tough split decision over the then new champion Ken Norton.

Although he had his fair share of easy wins, including a one round TKO of Marvis Frazier, Larry Holmes did not emulate Joe Louis with a bum of the month club, and it took all his ability to see off some of his contenders. Heavyweight boxing has always been highly politicised; at that time there were two bodies: the WBA and the WBC; Holmes was the WBC champion. In 1983, a third organisation was formed, the IBF; he relinquished the WBC title and was recognised as IBF Champion, defending successfully against another difficult opponent.

In September 1985, he had his forty-ninth professional fight. He could have handpicked this and his next opponent to retire with a record of 50-0 beating the legendary Rocky Marciano. Instead, he chose a tough opponent, the undisputed light-heavyweight champion Michael Spinks, who vacated his titles and stepped up.

Although a clear favourite, Holmes had chosen probably the most dangerous opponent he could have, and lost a surprise unanimous decision in what was arguably the most lacklustre performance of his career. He lost the inevitable rematch too, by a split decision that was, to put it mildly, extremely controversial.

That was as good as things got for Spinks, after a big payday against former Holmes opponent Gerry Cooney, he turned in the most disgraceful performance of his career, laying down in 91 seconds against Mike Tyson, a fight he could have won if he hadn't turned up looking like a frightened chicken.

After the Spinks rematch, Larry Holmes retired, but decided unwisely to return. It is best not to say too much about his later career, but he won his final fight by unanimous

decision to finish in 2002 at the age of 52 with a record of 69 wins in 75 fights with 6 losses and 44 knockouts.

Away from the ring, he has avoided the scandals that seem to follow many top boxers; married with a son and daughter, he built a local business empire, and has made both TV and film appearances.

Unsurprisingly, the man has his own [personal website](#), but you might like to check out some of his fights on YouTube. Arguably his greatest performance was the rematch with Ernie Shavers in September 1979. Late in the seventh, Shavers pole axed him, and he went down, but incredibly got up, and not only held on to the end of the round, but went on to win in the eleventh. The referee stopped the fight with Shavers still on his feet, but at that point he was shipping some heavy punishment, and it was noticeable that he didn't complain.

Now aged seventy, Shavers lives in the UK and is perhaps even more surprisingly an ordained minister. It remains to be seen if he will be present in Easton on November 3, but don't be too surprised if there is a big turnout from the boxing fraternity as well as the locals.

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