

MARTYN TULLEY

LENNOX

LEWIS

A PUGILISTIC HISTORY



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Introduction

WHEN an English-born 23-year-old wearing a Canadian vest won the super-heavyweight gold medal at the Seoul Olympics in October 1988, few could have imagined that he would go on to be ranked alongside the greatest heavyweights of all time. His name was Lennox Lewis.

No sooner had he beaten the highly rated American Riddick Bowe in the final at the Chamsil Students Gymnasium than Lewis was being courted by many of the world's top managers and promoters, particularly in the United States.

So it was a big surprise when Lewis decided to turn professional in the land of his birth and even more surprising that he did so under the guidance of Frank Maloney, then a relatively obscure figure in the world of big-time boxing.

On 27 June 1989, eight months after his Olympic triumph, Lewis beat a journeyman fighter named Al Malcolm in London to launch

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what was to become an eventful – and at times rocky – 14-year journey.

It was an odyssey that would see Lewis go on to win the British, Commonwealth and European titles, and take him all the way to the pinnacle of his sport as a three-time heavyweight champion of the world. Lewis ended his career universally regarded as the best heavyweight of his generation.

But like all journeys, it was not always smooth. Along the way, he encountered his share of battles, setbacks and controversies, both inside and outside of the ring. The aim of this book is not to deliver an unofficial biography of Lewis's life but concentrate on his fights in the ring, giving an in-depth history of the self-proclaimed 'Pugilist Specialist' that was Lennox Lewis.

The Early Days

BORN in Stratford, east London, England on 2 September 1965, Lennox Claudius Lewis was the second son of Violet Lewis. She had moved to London from her native Jamaica nine years earlier in search of a better life. Lennox and his older brother Dennis were born to two separate fathers and Violet decided to bring up her boys alone. As a single parent who also held down a nursing job at East Ham General Hospital, times were hard. Later, it was agreed that to ease Violet's burden Dennis would go and live with his father whilst Lennox remained with her.

Violet eventually travelled to America, where she spent a year in Chicago. Although many of her friends from Jamaica had settled there she did not qualify for a green card, which meant she was unable to work legally in the United States. As a result, she found it difficult to make any sort of life for herself. When she received news that Lennox, who had remained in London with his aunt Gee, had got into

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trouble fighting at school, she left Chicago and returned to London.

Later, Violet decided to leave England for a second time and try her luck in Kitchener, a manufacturing city in Ontario, Canada. On this occasion, though, she took the young Lennox with her.

Initially, things went well. Violet found a job in a factory, although her immigrant status meant she was forced to pay the full fees for Lennox's schooling. Combined with other factors, it became a struggle to get by.

It was decided that Lennox, who was still only seven and had only been in Canada for six months, should return to his aunt Gee in London until his mother got on her feet. He could then rejoin her in Kitchener, a place he loved.

Lennox's return took longer than expected. He spent five years in England, during which time he was forced to attend two separate boarding establishments for children considered unruly and troublesome. But Lennox also re-established his relationship with his brother and finally, at the age of 12, with his mother settled in Kitchener, he was reunited with her.

THE EARLY DAYS

Upon his return to Canada, Lennox became friendly with a boy named Andrew Powis and with him began boxing at the Waterloo Police Boxing Association Gymnasium, run by a sergeant called Jerome McComb.

Eventually, Lennox was trained by a man named Arnie Boehm and under his guidance he became a skilful amateur boxer. Not only was Lennox naturally talented, he was also extremely dedicated. He never shirked training and was always willing to listen and learn.

He was later helped in his amateur career by a Romanian-born coach named Adrian Teodorescu, who was initially appointed as coach to the Canadian national boxing team before subsequently being promoted to head coach for the Canadian Seoul Olympic squad.

Lennox would eventually go on to enjoy a successful unpaid career, which saw him become the most celebrated fighter in the country's amateur boxing history.

In November 1983, the then 18-year-old Lennox travelled to San Domingo in the Dominican Republic to take gold at the World Junior Championships. The following

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year, Lennox also represented Canada in the super-heavyweight division at the Los Angeles Olympics, going out in the second round to eventual winner Tyrell Biggs (who he later beat as a professional).

Although Lennox was already being tempted by hefty financial offers to turn professional, he resisted the lure of money and instead set his sights on gold-medal glory at the Seoul Olympics in 1988.

After winning his first senior title at the Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh, Scotland in July 1986, Lennox's Olympic dream became a reality.

Having comfortably negotiated the early rounds in Seoul, Lennox was given a bye straight into the final when his semi-final opponent, a Pole named Janusz Zaremkiewicz, withdrew with a broken hand.

In the final, Lewis met the young American Riddick Bowe, who hailed from the same Brownsville district as Mike Tyson and prior to the Games had been declared a nailed-on favourite to win gold.

THE EARLY DAYS

But Lewis cared little for reputations. In the second round, Lewis overwhelmed Bowe, forcing two counts and stopping the favourite on his feet. Lennox Lewis had arrived. Not only had he capped his already-impressive amateur career by becoming an Olympic champion, but the time was now right for him to capitalise on his success by turning professional.

Turning Professional

NOT surprisingly, winning the super-heavyweight gold medal at the Seoul Olympics had made Lewis a hot property. Originally, he was expected to turn professional with a group called Mallet Sports Inc., which was controlled by a Canadian businessman named David Hurst. Hurst was already involved with both Lewis and another Canadian boxer called Egerton Marcus, who had won middleweight silver in Seoul, thanks to a deal agreed several months before the Games.

But Lewis was advised to reject the deal with Mallet Sports Inc. and after considering several outstanding offers from a number of top managers and promoters worldwide, he eventually signed with an up-and-coming British outfit called World Sports Promotions.

The group was run by Ambrose Mendy and Frank Maloney, who were already handling the career of the exciting British middleweight

TURNING PROFESSIONAL

Nigel Benn. In order to back up what they were offering Lewis, Mendy and Maloney were forced to bring in another party with the necessary financial clout to make the deal work.

This role was filled by the Olympic Gold Group, a new sports arm of the already-successful Levitt Group, owned by a businessman called Roger Levitt. However, because of Mendy's criminal record and prison background, the Levitt Group was not overly keen to work with him.

Mendy then encouraged Maloney to try again with the Levitt Group on his own. Even though it had originally been Mendy who came up with the idea of approaching the Levitt Group for backing, on securing the deal of a lifetime Maloney felt he had no option but to leave Mendy behind.

The eventual deal struck was a fantastic one for all concerned. On 23 April 1989, Lewis, accompanied by his American lawyer John Hornewer, flew to London to sign the contracts.

The 6ft 5in Lewis was now all set to embark on his professional journey in Britain, which

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had not boasted a world heavyweight champion since Bob Fitzsimmons 90 years earlier.

Lewis was to be officially managed by Maloney, a 5ft 3in Cockney, and trained by John Davenport, a former US Marine drill sergeant who had a reputation for being a very hard taskmaster. Lewis was ready to go.



Fight 1

AL MALCOLM

Venue: Royal Albert Hall, London, England

Date: 27 June 1989

Scheduled rounds: Six

Weights: Lewis 231lbs; Malcolm 215lbs

Records: Lewis debut; Malcolm 11-12-1

Result: Lewis won KO2

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LENNOX Lewis made his professional debut at the Royal Albert Hall in west London 268 days after winning the Olympic gold medal. He took on journeyman Al Malcolm on the undercard of a ten-round welterweight bout between the Scotsman Gary Jacobs and American Rollin Williams.

Malcolm, from Birmingham, was eight years older than Lewis at 31 and had lost half of his 24 contests, with one draw. Despite his poor record, he was the reigning Midlands Area champion, having won the vacant crown in January 1987 with a ninth-round stoppage of Ian Priest.

At 6ft 3in, Malcolm was only two inches shorter than Lewis but gave away over a stone in weight. Lewis looked in fantastic shape: long, lean and ready to do damage. Malcolm was an ideal first opponent: worthy but not too dangerous.

As expected, Lewis's paid bow didn't last long. Understandably keen to impress, Lewis dropped Malcolm with a left hook inside a minute and almost fell over himself trying to finish the fight as he pounded Malcolm all over the ring in the first round.

AL MALCOLM

The fight ended unsatisfactorily just 19 seconds into round two when Malcolm tried to land a looping right hand and his forward momentum sent him face-first to the canvas. As he got up on to his knees, Malcolm began squinting and holding his glove up to his right eye, a position he was still in when the referee's count reached ten.

Lewis raised both arms aloft – a trademark pose that would become familiar throughout his career – and was declared the winner of his first professional fight.

Although Lewis had tried too hard to look good, there was plenty to be excited about. He had shown aggression, variety and punching power in the short time the fight lasted. Despite carrying his hands low, the power, talent and potential were undeniable. Lewis had taken his first step on a road that would eventually take him to the top of the world.