



THE MARVIN HAGLER STORY **MARVELOUS**

BIOGRAPHY BY DAMIAN AND BRIAN HUGHES

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Introduction

WHEN A boxer steps into a ring, there are a number of different motivations which propel him into action. Some fighters box through inspiration, a passion to push their abilities as far as possible. Other fighters use rationalisation, an understanding that this is what they are best equipped to do. Others, however, box out of desperation, a primal urge to fight their way past an opponent and past the hand that life has dealt them.

As he looked out at the thronging mass of 12,000 British supporters, waving their Union flags and screaming themselves hoarse, aiming their insults and profanities in his direction, Marvin Hagler danced lightly on his toes and remained sphinx-like in his demeanour, yet inside, “the Monster that lives inside me”, as Hagler had explained it, absorbed it all. It stored up all grudges and slights, perceived or otherwise, as a primal fury, ready to explode.

There was a buzz of expectation. There is something special about a world championship fight. As the Wembley Arena arc lights were dimmed the spotlight searched for the lone figure of Alan Minter, the undisputed world middleweight champion, who had begun to snake his way towards the ring. He was flanked by Doug Bidwell, his manager, Kevin, Bidwell’s son and Bobby Neil. The crowd, many with National Front leanings, carried him along on a wave of unabashed patriotic fervour. Dancing alone in the ring, Hagler remained impassive to the blanket of noise and

hatred which remained unabated even when the Panamanian referee Carlos Berrocal beckoned both men towards the centre of the apron to administer his final instructions as the huge partisan crowd awaited for the opening bell to ring.

While he spoke, Hagler returned the fierce glare of his foe. His monster gathered together the fuel to drive him on towards his destiny of the undisputed world middleweight championship. The build-up to this fight provided it with plenty of ammunition.

He recalled how when he had arrived on English soil, he was met by the British press contingent and plunged into immediate controversy, including being forced to deny that he was a racist.

Peter Moss, a *Daily Mail* journalist, was among a throng of press men lying in wait at the airport. Moss suggested that, “despite wearing a baseball cap, it doesn’t hide his image as the ugliest American alive”. Hagler incensed the press corps by refusing to sign any autographs or pose for any photographs. His attempts to explain himself, blaming the long flight and a desire to do himself justice when he spoke to them, did not offer any appeasement. Several of the following day’s reports offered the contrast to “truly great fighters, like Muhammad Ali, who have emerged dancing and singing from journeys which are twice the distance”. He was also bombarded with questions about his racist instincts.

The race claim had gained publicity when Minter gave an interview in which he alleged that the American had refused to shake hands with him when they met in Las Vegas a few months previous. The bluetouch paper was lit when Minter recounted that Hagler had explained, “I don’t touch white flesh.” The challenger attempted to defuse this powder keg by emphasising why he had come to England. “I am not here for a race fight,” he said. “I am here to show people that I’m a champion. And, I am going to do a job to take the world championship belt back to the United States.” He denied the remarks by offering the defence, “I’m not a racist. I live in a

white neighbourhood and I have lots of white friends.” His monster was aggrieved by the slur. Hagler allowed it to find its voice. “There is no love in this game,” he said. “Before a fight there are no friends. You aim to destroy each other. Maybe after the fight is over, I will shake hands with my opponent.”

The following day, The Casanova Club in London’s West End was at bursting point with a phalanx of press, photographers, radio and television representatives for the fight’s first official press conference. Minter’s crude attempts to build up the fight, choosing to cast Hagler as a force of evil, coming from Boston into London to steal his championship crown had been successful. It was announced that all 12,000 seats had been sold.

Hagler, dressed like a city gent in a smart blue pin-striped suit, wore dark glasses to protect himself from flashbulbs and intense media lights as much as from the glare of the four chunky gold rings adorning his fingers. He continued to project the image of malevolence by refusing to comply with requests to answer questions and chose instead to simply read a statement. He repeated his earlier claims, “I would like to tell all you people straight. This is not a racial fight.” He also chose to remind the press of Minter’s own dubious stance on racial issues. “Minter, being the champion, should not have made the remark that he would not lose his title to a black man.” He made an attempt at conciliation by explaining, “My aim in life is to see the racial barriers broken down. In my neighbourhood, when I play with the kids, I don’t see them as black or white, just kids.” He finished his statement by reminding the attendees of his Hagler Trust Fund which helped youngsters from his home town of Brockton go to school: “If you’re gifted enough to be up here, you should help others who are not so well off.” Finally, he signed off by allowing his monster the final word, “I’ve never shaken hands with an opponent, black or white, amateur or professional, before a fight. I’m getting physically and mentally ready to

tear the man apart. Afterwards, I will think about whether we can become friends.” With that, he walked out of the conference leaving the press to digest his words.

As the crowd’s lusty version of ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ began to cascade in waves from the back of the arena, Hagler continued to stare through Minter’s eyes and into his soul. His monster recounted the words of Kevin Finnegan, another source of motivation.

Finnegan had shared the ring for 61 rounds during five dramatic fights against both Alan Minter and Hagler and so was considered sufficiently well informed to give an opinion on the merits of both men. Despite losing on three occasions to Minter, his ire was solely reserved for the American. He conceded that Hagler was “one of the five toughest fighters I have ever boxed in the ring” and he nominated him as the sole representative in his list of fighters “I have ever truly disliked during my boxing career”.

He explained, “I hate him, I really do hate him. He is a bully and one of the dirtiest boxers alive,” claiming that Hagler’s two victories had been due, in no small part, to his blatant use of the head and other nefarious means. He tipped Minter to emerge victorious inside the 15-round distance but he sounded a note of caution: “Alan has to be careful. Because Hagler is shrewd, strong, mean, and he wants that title badly.”

Hagler publicly dismissed his opinion and declared to the press that, “Kevin Finnegan is a cry baby.” Privately, he was angry at the allegations of foul play, believing that it would influence the referee and judges. “It is unprofessional of Finnegan to make allegations like that. I was big enough to praise him after the fights because he was a tough son-of-a-bitch but I can assure you that all those cuts he suffered were made purely by my fists – not my head.”

He offered the example of Vito Antuofermo, who had required 45 stitches after their fight, “I suppose Finnegan will say those cuts were made by my head but Antuofermo had

some class and he certainly didn't." He concluded his defence by suggesting that Finnegan's outburst had been fuelled by something other than hate. "Maybe he'd had too much of that stout when he made his claims. He's certainly fond of the stuff," concluded Hagler.

As he retreated back to his corner, where his long-time trainers, the Petronelli brothers, Goody and Pat, and his attorney Steve Wainwright were waiting, Hagler's unblinking glare didn't leave his opponent, who was dressed in bright red shorts and matching boots. It took in every detail which could prove valuable in wresting the crown from the head of Minter. The predator Hagler noted that despite the layers of grease on his face, Minter appeared to be dry-mouthed and nervous. The monster added the fuel from two days ago to the mounting fire of rage.

At the final press conference, which took place in the Wembley ring, the two combatants met face to face and the mutual antipathy was palpable. Harry Mullen, the esteemed boxing writer, suggested, "If the action in the ring turned out to be as ferocious as the words preceding the fight, it will be something really special."

Despite his earlier statement and to his intense irritation, Hagler was required to explain on a number of occasions that he had been misquoted about his reluctance to touch white flesh. He did clarify, however, that he "would have no problem hurting it in the ring".

He explained that his real resentment against Alan Minter was because Minter held the world title, which Hagler considered his property. "I won the right to be called the middleweight champion of the world when I beat Vito Antuofermo last year in Las Vegas. I won 12 of the 15 rounds and they only gave me a draw. That should have made me the number one contender and receive an immediate return fight against Antuofermo, but instead, Minter was given the championship fight against Antuofermo. He didn't beat the Vito Antuofermo who I fought. He beat what was left of him."

His monster betrayed the desperation which drove him on, "It should have been Marvin Hagler, who got the second chance at Antuofermo, not Minter."

Minter's response was sharp and straight. "Hagler should not moan about not getting his chance. He had it against Antuofermo and he blew it. He forgets that I was kept waiting and hanging around for two years as the number one contender." Minter continued, "I was sat ringside when Hagler fought Antuofermo and I genuinely thought Hagler just about deserved to be declared the winner. But he didn't get the verdict. He didn't get the championship. I did – and there is no way he will take it from me. I beat Antuofermo far more clearly than he did. I know that in boxing that may not account for everything, but I am quite sure I will beat him and leave him with nothing else to complain about."

Before he left the corner, Hagler said to Goody Petronelli, "I'm ready to die for this. Don't stop it." When the first bell sounded, the two southpaws made good on their promise to bring the bitter war of words to life. Hagler was first from his corner, his monster spitting out the words "seek and destroy" as a final reminder of his intent, and his sharp and aggressive attack seemed to take Minter by surprise. His own strategy appeared to be to keep the challenger at long range, as he had successfully done against Vito Antuofermo, when winning the title. Hagler refused to yield to this plan.

After the initial opening skirmish, both men chose to adopt a jab-and-move approach but Minter's desire for serious action caused him to try and tempt his opponent into a punch-up. Hagler resisted and maintained his discipline. His slashing, scything punches were thrown with a radar-like accuracy and started to cause damage for Minter and consternation for his corner, which had sought to assuage their doubts about Alan's tendency to cut easily and employed the veteran American Jackie McCoy, as a specialist cuts man. By the time the bell sounded to signal the end of the first three pulsating minutes Minter returned to his

corner red-faced and with two seeping cuts around his left eye. This would prove a huge hindrance to his battle plan of winning from distance.

Minter was forced to engage at close quarters and when he launched an opening salvo in the second round, he caught Hagler with a few lefts to the head followed by a pumping right jab into the American's face. The increase in the volume of the partisan crowd mirrored the confidence levels of the champion but it merely proved illusory.

Hagler marched on with a demonic intensity, impervious to the attack, and rained a fusillade of punches on to his target. The tissue-thin skin was unable to resist and soon blood began to cascade down Minter's face. Many of the crowd refused to accept that this vulnerability had been legally exposed and echoed Kevin Finnegan's claims that Hagler was liberally using his shaven head to inflict the damage. The mood within the arena started to turn decidedly sour.

Minter drank deep from his well of courage and despite Hagler opening a jagged cut beneath his nose, he attempted to ward off his foe. One observer later described it as "like King Canute vainly trying to turn back the tide" as Hagler swept over him like a tidal wave, crashing both of his fists with an unrelenting fury, ripping open another cut over Minter's eye.

It was starting to become increasingly obvious that the champion's bravery would not be enough to stand between Hagler and his much-coveted title and the Panamanian referee, Carlos Berrocal, focused intently on the British fighter, mentally weighing up the right moment to intervene. He later admitted that he was worried about the wounds which rendered Minter's face into a grotesque red mask as well as the venom which was dripping from Hagler's unceasing assault.

Every punch he delivered landed with a terrifying thud. Hagler helped to finally make up his mind by delivering a brutally accurate right hook on to the unguarded jaw

of Minter and when the referee stepped between them and waved his hands to signal the end of the contest, he administered what Hagler described as “the final act of justice by sending the world middleweight championship across the Atlantic to Brockton, Massachusetts, where it should have been in the first place”.

There was a momentary silence in the arena as spectators attempted to come to terms with what had just happened. It seemed that after registering that the American was holding his arms aloft, the nationalistic fervour, the racial undertones and the bad blood which had all been prevalent in the build-up, created a powder keg, which exploded.

A shower of detritus descended on the ring, forcing all of those present to run for cover. Harry Carpenter, commentating at ringside for the BBC, was hit by a bottle yet continued his condemnatory commentary of the crowd's antics. Vito Antuofermo, the Italian-American who lost his world title to Minter, was covering the fight for US TV and he also took flight. He was attacked by a drunk, who was swiftly despatched by the former champion. Hagler was forced to take cover in his corner before being hurriedly escorted by the police to the sanctuary of his dressing room, where he was finally presented with his newly acquired championship belt.

Bob Arum, Hagler's promoter, was incensed by the crowd's behaviour. He expressed his incredulity that the “home of sportsmanship” would respond in such a manner. His main gripe was the fact that it denied his man the honour of receiving his belt in the symbolic fashion of a champion. “It is unacceptable that Marvin had no chance to bask in his triumph and enjoy becoming world champion and was not allowed to be interviewed for American television,” said Arum.

Hagler was sanguine about it. He had the title, which was all he cared about. He held up his two fists and marvelled at them while telling the press, “I made these my referee and

judges. That is all that counts.” He would allow the monster to store any grudges for future occasions.

* * * * *

After the mayhem had subsided, Hagler and his corner team retreated to the safe haven of their Bailey’s Hotel base. Waiting for him were 20 of his friends and family from Brockton who were enthusiastically recounting the nine blood-spattered minutes of ferocious fighting and trading.

When the new champion entered the room, wearing his smart three-piece pin-stripe suit and looking like an incongruous city gent who had completed a day’s work on the trading floor, he moved around the room to shake hands and accept the congratulations while Bob Arum started singing “God bless America, the land that I love” as Hagler’s sparring partners, Robbie Simms and Danny Snyder, danced beneath the American flag they had clumsily hung.

The next day, Hagler sat in silent contemplation as the plane circled Boston’s Logan Airport, wondering what kind of a reception he would receive. He reflected on his arrival home from Las Vegas just 12 months earlier, frustrated by a disputed draw against Vito Antuofermo, and greeted by a handful of the faithful fans who had waited at the airport. “Would today be any different?” he debated with Bertha, his wife. “Will I finally get the respect I deserve?”

Shortly after clearing customs, he received his answer as he was besieged by fans who wanted to acknowledge his new status as world champion, along with the blinding flash of paparazzi who wanted to capture his image. Hagler stood, seemingly shocked by the scene until the state police cleared the way for him to jump inside a waiting limousine.

The ensuing motorcade snaked its way through the rush-hour traffic clogging the Southeast Expressway. When it entered the city limits of Brockton, Hagler switched cars, being driven into his adopted home town in an antique Ford

Model T, which had the licence plate HAGLER. As he drove through the streets which were thronged by an estimated 35,000 locals, Marvin waved to the crowds with one hand while waving a small American flag with the other, telling his wife, "This whole thing feels like a dream."

When he arrived at the 80-year-old Brockton City Hall, the band greeted him by playing the National Anthem. City mayor David Crosby warmly embraced him before offering a speech which culminated in the presentation of the keys to the city.

Hagler began his acceptance speech by declaring, "It feels good to be home and it feels good to be an American." He then paid tribute to the city's first world champion, Rocky Marciano, for putting Brockton on the map and promised that he would respect his legacy by keeping it there. He embraced Marciano's aged mother who was sitting nearby. He then reminded them all of his own journey to the summit. "I'm the world champion," he declared. "And I've got here by believing in myself and fighting the hard way to the top. I have earned this title the hard way and I don't intend to give it up."

The Marvelous Marvin Hagler Story

MARVIN HAGLER was born on 23 May 1954, in Newark, the first child of Ida Mae Hagler and Robert Sims (who weren't married at the time, hence Marvin's surname). The latter abandoned the family when Marvin was a child, leaving Ida Mae to raise Marvin and his brother, Robbie, and their four sisters, Veronica, Cheryl, Genarra and Noreen, on welfare. Hagler grew up in the playgrounds and the streets: cruising sidewalks, hanging out, playing sports, boxing shadows, dreaming big.

"I always wanted to be somebody," Hagler said. "Baseball, I played like I was Mickey Mantle or Willie Mays; basketball, I'd be Walt Frazier; boxing, I'd pretend I was Floyd Patterson or Emile Griffith." Hagler first put on gloves when he was ten for a man he knew only as Mister Joe, a social worker.

By then, Hagler was a fatherless loner who turned Ida Mae's back porch into a clinic for wounded birds and a coop for raising and training pigeons. A turtle lived on the fire escape, and to Ida Mae's dismay Marvin even let it swim in the family tub. "They were the only friends I could relate to," Hagler said of the animals. "Maybe the only friends I really liked. I was always by myself."

Hagler was reaching out when Mister Joe reached in. "He helped me with any problems I had," Hagler recalled.

“He taught me sports. We went to the park to fly kites. He’d call up, ‘What’s the problem? You gonna be at the club?’ He kept me out of trouble. He got me involved in counselling other kids. I haven’t seen him since I was a kid, and I’ve been trying to find the guy again for a long time. I do believe that one day he’ll show up.”

Mister Joe gave Marvin his first set of gloves, and his uncles began to teach him how to use them. “A rough bunch,” Hagler laughed.

“He always said he wanted to be a boxer,” Ida Mae recalled. “I didn’t believe him. He said he wanted to be like Floyd Patterson. ‘When I get grown,’ he’d say, ‘I’m gonna buy you a home.’ I thought he’d be a social worker. He loved little kids.”

The uncles came and went, as did the broken-winged birds, the pigeons, Mister Joe. The one constant in Marvin’s life was his immediate family: his grandmother, Bessie Hagler, his brother, his sisters and Ida Mae. “We were close, very close,” said Cheryl. On birthdays and holidays they came together to celebrate.

Ida Mae – a bright, jovial woman of exceptional strength and vitality who kept the kids on a short rein – worked as a caterer and housekeeper. When Marvin was 14 and a freshman in high school, he dropped out of school to work in a toy factory to help support the family.

“As long as we have each other, we can make it,” Ida Mae used to tell them. And, “Don’t get on the wrong track: No drugs, no prisons for us.” And, “Stay away from strangers. Mind your own business.” And, “Come straight home from school. Stay home until I get home.”

Ida Mae’s word was law. “That’s what brought us up to be the way we are,” said Marvin. “Everybody that came into the house, you better make sure it was ‘miss’ or ‘mister’ when you spoke. That’s the way she was.”

Although they were poor, at Christmas there was always a tree, at dinner-time there was always a meal. If the clothes

weren't new, they were always clean. "We took care of what we had," Veronica said. And when there was a race riot, Ida Mae was there, her voice a broom that whisked the kids under Veronica's bed. That's how they survived the first riot, living close to the ground. It began on 12 July 1967. For five days Newark was a battleground and the Haglers were caught in the crossfire. They lived on the top floor of a three-story building. Looking down on the streets at the looters, Marvin says, was like watching ants on a picnic table.

"People were running out of stores," Marvin recalled, "carrying big TVs on their backs, and couches. You'd see little guys trying to carry things they couldn't even carry."

"Really terrifying," Ida Mae shivered. At night, she drew the shades, turned off the lights and double-locked the door, securing it further by jamming the back of a chair under the knob. For three days no one left the apartment. "She'd have killed us," Hagler says. When uncle Eugene, who had been visiting, tried to leave the apartment to get home, a burst of gunfire chipped the facade above the front stoop and drove him back inside. The Haglers lay that night under Veronica's bed. One night, two bullets smashed through the bedroom window and shattered the plaster above the bed.

"Stay away from the windows," Ida Mae told her family. Police and National Guardsmen were everywhere – on the street, on the rooftops, chasing looters, searching for snipers. "You could hear them running across the roof above us," Ida Mae recounted. "There was running and cussing and policemen outside." Ida Mae forbade any of the kids to stand up. For three days they went about the five-room apartment on all fours, sliding around on cushions to get to the bathroom and the kitchen.

"It was like the end of the world," Veronica said.

By the time it was over, 26 people had died, and whole ghetto neighbourhoods of the once vibrant city lay in ruin: Buildings were abandoned, garbage and mattresses were strewn in the streets, and countless cars were stripped.

“It was scary,” Marvin said.

Ida Mae thought, “I never want to go through that again.”

Nearly two years later there was another riot. A thousand angry blacks roamed the streets, smashing store windows, looting and throwing bottles at police cars. Once again, the Hagler kids weren’t allowed outdoors. The 1969 riot lasted only two nights, and no one was killed, but Ida Mae called a relative in Brockton, Massachusetts, 20 miles from Boston, and asked her to help find the Haglers a place to live.

So, with the help of friends, a few weeks later she filled a U-Haul truck with their belongings and moved the family to Brockton, once renowned for its shoe factories, later as Rocky Marciano’s home town, a city that hadn’t seen much social unrest since militant townsmen with hunting rifles took to its streets to support Shays’ Rebellion in 1786. An old blue-collar town, it is also a mixed ethnic salad of Yankees, French Canadians, Lithuanians, Italians and Irish, with a small percentage of blacks and Puerto Ricans.

“What a relief,” Ida Mae sighed. “It was wonderful. I could leave my doors unlocked. The kids could go outside and sit on the porch. I was strict in Newark because I had to be; here I let up a little.”

In culture shock, Hagler didn’t adjust so readily. “I felt out of place, going from an all-black society to a mixed society,” he explained. “The only place I’d run across whites was in stores. They were always behind the counter, taking the cash. School principals. Police. The post office. I really didn’t trust them. If they were nice, I thought, ‘What do they want from me?’ I had to learn for myself how people really were. When I found out all white people weren’t bad, I started to relax around them. It took me a long time. Goody and Pat had a lot to do with that.”

Teaming Up With The Petronelli Brothers

FROM THE age of 15, Hagler started to visit some of Brockton's boxing gymnasiums. Vinnie Vecchione, who in later years became well known when he pulled his fighter Peter McNeeley out of a one-sided mismatch against Mike Tyson, recalled that the quiet young man would sit on the sidelines, resisting offers to join in, and instead would watch fighters including Angie Carlino, who would later become Hagler's personal photographer, going through their work-outs.

Two brothers, Guerino, who was more commonly known as Goody, and Pasquale, nicknamed Pat, also ran a boxing club. The pair were partners in a small construction company. They had both boxed as amateurs and had been close friends of the late world heavyweight champion Rocky Marciano. After Goody had left the US Navy, following 27 years of service, in which he had served in the medical corps and had also been the division's boxing coach, he persuaded his brother to join him in continuing to develop young fighters.

Hagler was drawn back to their gym on a number of occasions, continuing his practice of sitting quietly and diligently observing the fighters' every move. After a while, Goody approached him and asked him if he wanted to learn how to box. Goody, the recognised trainer of the two brothers, recalled years later that he had not approached the shy young man earlier because, "I recognised that it would take time to cement and mature a trust and friendship with him. Marvin seemed to have a deep distrust about white people and so I took my time."

After his first week of training with the Petronelli brothers, they both noticed his fierce desire and eager willingness to listen and learn. "His passion for boxing was intense," Goody recalled. "He appeared fascinated with boxing and seemed to love everything about it from the smell of the liniment and the rich leather of the boxing gloves through to the different techniques he saw the other boxers practising. I vividly remember on one occasion when he came and spoke about a green pair of gloves he had seen Emile Griffith wearing in one fight. He told me that he favoured red gloves. 'They are my favourite colour,' he said, 'because that's the colour of blood'"

Hagler soon became a regular face at the gym, turning up every single day. Goody Petronelli recalled, "Like most kids who start off, he received a black eye, a swollen nose or cut lips. All of the little knocks and bruises. Unlike many kids, he never lost interest and it never put him off. He would be back in the gym the next day."

Petronelli was impressed that his learning curve was in such a steep ascent. "After a while, I told Marvin how pleased I was with his development. His eyes lit up with delight. He confessed that when he went home, he continued to practise his moves over and over again in a big mirror. 'One day, I want to be somebody famous,' he said."

The brothers registered Hagler for an amateur card and were unaware that he had lied to them about his date of birth.

He claimed to be two years older than his 16 years in order to be allowed to box in sanctioned tournaments much sooner.

Hagler was also given a labouring job with the Petronellis' construction company. His attitude towards his tasks, including digging ditches, mixing cement, cutting down trees and other hard labouring jobs, also impressed the trainers. The experience also proved to be an education to Hagler. Much of the work was situated across town in Brockton's affluent white West Side. Hagler later recalled, "Those areas were always nice and the people there were courteous and friendly." He told his mother that this was the place he wanted to live when he had made the big money. His trust in Pat and Goody was also built in these early days. "They taught me a trade and matured me. I found out that I could trust these two people and I intended to repay that."

Hagler's early amateur days initially found him searching for his ring persona. He first attempted to showboat and imitate Muhammad Ali's theatrics, which earned him the nickname 'Marvelous' after a local reporter in Lowell, Massachusetts, commented on his spectacular fighting style. As he progressed, he adopted a southpaw stance despite being a natural orthodox and dispensed of the showboating and adopted instead a serious, no-nonsense demeanour, focusing on utilising his natural strengths, including his balance, poise and stingingly accurate two-handed punching power.

His amateur career was brief and relatively unspectacular. He won 50 of his 52 contests, the highlight being his victory as a middleweight in the 85th National Amateur Athletic Union Championship in 1973. His opponent was Terry Dobbs, a durable Marine. Goody Petronelli recalled that this was his finest moment in the ring to date and compared him to a young Henry Armstrong. The officials were equally impressed by his stylish combination punches and voted him as the tournament's 'Outstanding Boxer'. This achievement was even more impressive when the list of other fighters included light-welterweight champion Aaron Pryor,

imminent Olympic gold medallist and world heavyweight champion Leon Spinks (who was flattened in one round), and a young boxer named Randy Shields who beat one Sugar Ray Leonard. “Marvin showed that he had something special that night and for the first time, he made people sit up and notice him,” commented Goody Petronelli.

Hagler watched the television executives who covered the championships woo these various fighters, especially the Spinks brothers, Howard Davis, and the young Sugar Ray Leonard, grooming them for the next Olympic Games, following the country’s meagre return of one boxing gold medal in Munich. Petronelli said that he felt some resentment that despite his showing, he didn’t receive the same kind of interest.

Within weeks, he spoke with the brothers who had guided him and asked whether he could turn professional. “I had just become a father for the first time and realised that you can’t take a trophy and exchange it for a bag full of groceries,” he later said.