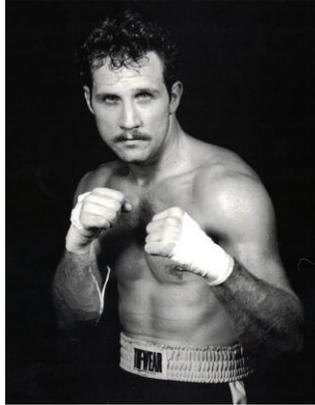


Chuck Walker
Mesa City Sports
Hall of Fame
2018



By Jason P. Skoda

Chuck Walker fully admits he was a different type of athlete.

The 1975 Mesa graduate never once played any sport for the Jackrabbits; never knew the honor of donning the purple and gold of his school.

“I didn’t know the difference between football and basketball,” Walker said. “I couldn’t throw a ball from here to there.”

And yet Walker is among the 2018 enshrinement class for the Mesa City Sports Hall of Fame which will be honored on November 19, at 7 p.m. at Red Mountain High.

That’s because even though he never represented Mesa High directly or tossed a ball for the Jackrabbits, Walker could throw a punch and did so while wearing the red, white and blue of the United States.

Walker, 61, developed into an excellent amateur boxer before eventually turning pro after getting his start at Gene Lewis Boxing Center on Broadway Ave. at the age of 13.

“It was a very odd beginning,” said the Conroe, Texas, resident. “One of my uncles just asked me if I wanted to go see some fights. I was drawn to it immediately and I said remember thinking ‘Oh, my God I have to do it’ and I kept pestering my Dad until he took me.

“I was just enamored by the science of it and the one-on-one battles.”

Those battles mostly went his way all throughout his amateur and pro status. In 1975, Walker was the national AAU champion as a light middleweight, won the North American Championship and finished with the bronze medal at the Pan-American Games in Mexico.

It led to Walker heading to the Olympic Trials in Cincinnati and earning a spot on the 1976 U.S. Olympic squad that competed in Montreal. The team was recently named the best U.S. Olympic boxing team in history as his teammates included Sugar Ray Leonard, Michael and Leon Spinks.

Walker was on par with his better-known teammates but lost a controversial second-round match to eventual gold medal winner Jerry Rybicki of Poland. The sentiment at the time by most onlookers, according to reports, was that Walker won the second and third rounds, especially the final round, but the Polish pugilist came away with the 3-2 split decision.

“The Olympics was A tremendous experience even though I kind of got the shaft,” said Walker, who sparred with George Foreman and Evander Holyfield in his career. “He was a tall and lanky southpaw that was awkward to fight. I got a feel for it as the fight went on and all most had him knocked out. It was a Communist packed judge panel and they ended my dream.

“Honestly, the farther I get away from it the more I cherish it. I was bitter for a long while but now I just realize what a great experience it was at such a young age.”

Walker, who stays fit by still hitting the bag, was good because of good footwork, as he was also an accomplished tap-dancer, and had good defensive skills he learned early on from Gene Lewis back in his early Mesa days.

“I was gifted with good defense, something Gene Lewis taught, and tremendous reflexes,” he said. “I had a lot of speed and good footwork. I didn’t rely on power much. I had about a 25 percent knockout percentage. I rather not get hit and out hit them than trade blows with him.”

That style continued into a pro career that saw Walker go 17-1-1 and reached a world ranking of No. 4 before retiring in 1986. What bothers him more than the controversial Olympic shot, was never getting the big fight professionally.

There was an offer on the table to fight Marvin Hagler at one point but never came to fruition and another time he had contract on the table for a world title fight, but the financial backing fell through.

“He should have gotten his shot, but it never fell in place for so many reasons,” his promoter and current business partner Sam Cable said. “No one above him would gain anything by fighting him because he was a tough matchup but wasn’t a big name. We didn’t have the money to promote him the way he should have been. He was probably the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world. So, everyone stayed away.”

Walker eventually became tired of the run around and eventually headed to Hollywood with Cable to start a movie production company. The Walker/Cable Production Co. has made more than 20 movies and they are enjoying their little niche in Hollywood.

So he will take break from producing movies and head to Mesa, his hometown, and be grateful to be honored by the Mesa City Hall of Fame.

“After all of this time, it feels really good,” he said. “I’m in a few others (boxing hall of fames), but this is the Mesa Hall of Fame. It’s for my very hometown, and that is pretty special.”