Sugar Ray—Duran? I'm hoping I'm wrong

SAM LACY: Sports A to Z

Frankly, this is a column I would prefer having someone else write . . . It is being done on Friday, but it is not because it is Friday the 13th that I'm approaching it with grave misgivings . . . You see, I'm about to express concern over the outcome of next Friday's Sugar Ray Leonard-Roberto-Duran welterweight title fight in Montreal.

And in this newspaper, and with my readers (if any are left), that is like slapping mom on Mother's Day . . . . Leonard's legions are like those of Muhammad Ali, and, before him, Joe Louis . . . . In the boxing ring, none of these men could do wrong in the eyes of their beholders.

Wary of Walter

So, when I venture that the beloved Sugar Ray stands to lose on Friday night, there is but one consolation for me . . . . I know the hate mail and ridiculing phone calls won't begin arriving for at least 10 days.

I do this, friends, despite some very strong warnings . . . . In the first place, the AFRO engraver, Walter Shields, has offered to wager $20 on Leonard . . . . And when Br'er Shields confronts you that way, you would be wise to look back and see whether someone is kneeling behind you and waiting for you to be pushed.

Digging Dave

The second, and more serious, warning comes in a conversation with Dave Jacobs, Leonard's longtime teacher, confidante and surrogate father . . . There is no one in boxing whose opinions I respect more.

"It will be a good fight — more likely a great fight — for a few rounds," said Jacobs in answer to my declaration that this is going to be the toughest test of Sugar Ray's career . . . . It also will be the first time Ray has met a guy who isn't afraid of him, I added.

"Your're right there," declared Dave . . . . "Duran never has sn own respect for anyone, he's not scared, and he always comes to fight . . . . Ring that bell and Roberto is like an enraged animal . . . he's on his man with a tenacity that says get-outa-here-or-be-mauled."

Won't be hunting

That is exactly what I mean . In all his past fights, Leonard has been forced to be the aggressor . . . . It figures to be a new experience for him not having to go hunting for his opponent . . . . Duran will be right there — on his chest, in his face.

"Right again," was the reply . . . "Roberto is famous for taking the fight to his man, and it is his tendency to put on pressure that may be his mistake . . . . Ray is quicker than any fighter Roberto ever has seen, not to mention any he has fought . . . . And every time he fails to trap Ray, he's gonna get popped . . . and those pops today, aren't the kind that were used to pile up points before . . . . with his increased power and savvy, Sugar's pops have become stoppers."

Confidence vs. conceit

I confessed that much of my concern comes from the fear that Leonard may have moved too fast and because of that, what once was confidence seems to have been replaced by conceit.

"Oh, I understand that," Jacobs admitted, "but it isn't like that as we move closer to this one (fight) . . . . Ray has matured . . . There's no more I'm-the-boss attitude . . . As the old folks used to say he is 'off the high horse,' though Ray really hasn't shown that sort of attitude, ever . . . . He listens and works, works and listens . . . . And, honestly, I look for him to knock out Roberto — even quickly, maybe."

Moth of flame

So, here I am . . . . warned against expecting a Duran victory, yet fearful of it, nonetheless.

I see Leonard in a dire dream, playing the role of a moth flitting in and out and daring the fire of Duran . . . . . No statistics are available to support a suspicion that the moth is caught as often as it escapes the flame, but it could be true . . . This time, I hope I'm wrong.

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Leonard-Duran recaptures glorious li'l-fighter days

NEW YORK (UPI) Sugar Ray Leonard's defense of his WBC welterweight title against Roberto Duran in Montreal, tonight (Friday), marks another big moment for little men in boxing history.

It's axiomatic in boxing that the bigger fellows — from middleweights through heavyweights — dominate the interest of the majority of the fans. That's because most of the big hitters are found among the heavier divisions.

The prospects of hard punching, plenty of blood and even perhaps serious injury ("I don't want to just beat Duran, I want to kill him," said Leonard) are still the major attractions of the sublime sport.

In modern times, such little men as Sandy Saddler, Willie Pep, Lou Ambers, Henry Armstrong and Barney Ross have taken the spotlight away from the heavier classes at least for short periods of time.

Thus, the Leonard-Duran bout shapes up as one of those "naturals," when the overall skills and the contrasting styles of the fighters produce a confrontation which commands unusual interest among the fans.

Leonard promises to become the richest, if not the best of the little men, inasmuch as his title-winning kayo of Wilfred Benitez last November earned him $1-million and the loser $1.2-million — the biggest payoff in history for non-heavyweights.

Saddler and Pep, hall of fame featherweights, fought four of the most vicious fights of all time during the 1950s. Saddler was tall for a featherweight (5-foot-8) and hit like a middleweight. Pep was a will o' the wisp boxer who retired in 1957 at the age of 241 fights. They took a royal dislike to each other. They used every dirty tactic in the book and during their fourth fight once threw the referee to the canvas when he tried to break them.

For the record, Saddler won three of the four bouts but to this day remembers bitterly that Pep was elected to boxing's Hall of Fame before him.

Armstrong, Ross and Ambers were the principal figures in Armstrong's campaign to become the only man in boxing history to hold three world titles simultaneously. Having knocked off all competition in the featherweight division, Armstrong decided to try for the lightweight and welterweight titles. Logically, of course, he would have tried for Ambers' lightweight title.

A little boxing skullduggery entered the act, believe it or not, and Armstrong beat Ross for the welterweight crown before he defeated Ambers for the lightweight title.

Armstrong was a buzz-saw fighter with enormous strength for his size. He took on a hollow shell of the great Ross on May 31, 1938, and dominated the fight all the way. It was evident that Armstrong could have knocked out Ross but Henry was aware of Ross' pride that he had never been knocked out. And so, Armstrong carried Ross through 15 rounds to win the second of his triple Crowns.

"He took Barney's title," said referee Arthur Donovan after the bout. "But he let him keep his pride."

Such men remained bound together through life, just as Leonard and Duran probably will be, by a unique bond.

"They become part of boxing history," says Angelo Dundee, who will be in Leonard's corner when Sugar Ray opposes Duran. "They are bound together by a common experience. Each knows he needed the other to reach the outer limits of his ability."

Sugar Ray Leonard would jump his toughest foe

Duran camp show worry over ref

MONTREAL (UPI) — The camp of challenger Roberto Duran is concerned over the World Boxing Council's selection of a referee for tonight's (Friday) welterweight title bout against Sugar Ray Leonard.

No selection has been announced but the WBC is expected to name veteran Carlos Padilla of the Philippines to handle the bout at the Olympic Stadium.

Ray Arcel, Duran's trainer, feels Padilla's style will hamper his fighter. Padilla, who is now based in Las Vegas, Nev., is quick to separate fighters and Duran is an aggressive boxer, who thrives on infighting.

The speedy Leonard, at 5-foot-10, has a three-inch height advantage and a 3½-inch reach advantage. A fight in the middle of the ring would be to his benefit.

Padilla handled the world middleweight championship fight between Vito Antuofermo and Alan Minter late last year and Antuofermo claimed Padilla's refusal to let him fight inside cost him his title.

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Leonard-Duran doubles Ali TV

With promoters indicating they expect 50,000 persons for the live gate at Montreal tonight, there also is expectancy of 1.8 million viewers of the Sugar Ray Leonard-Roberto Duran fight for closed-circuit television.

This would number more than twice the previous high to watch the first heavyweight title bout between then champion Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali.

As this speculation was progressing, World Boxing Council president Jose Sulanian met Wednesday with promoters in Montreal and set rules for the Friday (tonight) bout.

They decided on a 10-point must system with three judges adding the scoring. The referee will not have a vote. The three-knockdown rule in a round was waived and a fighter cannot be saved by the bell except in the 15th round.

There will be a mandatory eight-count in case of knockdowns but there cannot be a standing eight-count if a fighter is injured.

The boxers will use eight-ounce gloves. Leonard will wear white trunks with blue-and-white trim and Duran will wear red trunks with white trim.

How they shape up

LEONARD		DURAN
24	Age	29
147	Weight	147
5-10	Height	5-7
74	Reach	66½
38	Chest (normal)	37½
40	Chest (exp)	39½
15	Biceps	12½
11¾	Forearm	11
29	Waist	30
21	Thight	20½
13	Calf	12½
15½	Neck	16
7	Wrist	8½
11	Fist	8½
9¾	Ankle	8½

Rod Carew, master craftsman, will be back

SPORTSOUL Peter Harris

Look at me, nose in that June 8 Sunday paper . . . . my glance turning into a surprised stare as I followed the names of American League leading batters down, down and (no, it can't be!) still down.

In search of the Sweet Swisher's name: Rod Carew.

I found him (gasp!) in the number 24th position with a .309 batting average. Thanks to his seven batting titled history, I was shocked that Carew could (only?) be batting .309, with 175 at bats, 20 runs scored, 54 hits and 19 RBI, 48 games into the season.

You can't understand how important it has been for me, the original choke up, go-to-right-and-bunt baseball player, to see Carew's comforting name at the top of the hitting leaders' list. Unless you know the ritual that search became for me over the last eight years.

Mister 'Good Eyes'

My finger-walking and eye-squinching were weekend habits for me. They were fundamental reasons for me buying the Sunday paper. On Sundays, the sports pages included the complete list of batting averages earned by the leagues' regulars.

And from 1972 till 1979, under the heading INDIVIDUAL BATTING (and, in smaller type, 185 at bats or more), there it was: Carew Min, followed by the bulkiest .300 average in the American League (except, of course, in 1976, Brett KC, Lynn Bos). With heavy breathing and awe, I'd stare down at Carew's name, printed in bold agate type (the kind used for classified ads).

And CAREW seemed to explode upward into my hungry eyes.

Carew wasn't just a leading hitter, not just some slugger.

He was Mr. Good Eyes. The Best at using the potential of every at bat. For no balls, no strikes, to three balls, two strikes, Carew was a threat to top one over the mound into center, slap one into left, skip one by first base, spin-bunt one half-way down third.

Carew's confident left-handed swing was what made batting practice at Howard from 1973-1976 a learning process fo me (for I'd stay up there, skin on my hand degenerating into callouses, hoping that one of those bat swings would approximate Carew's perfection.

The pure craftsman

The Panamanian has been the artistic offensive thinker and craftsman in a game where both are important concerns.

His batting thoughts anticipated defenders' placements, line drive placements, pitched ball placements. And computed the correct angle, the subtle wrist-flick needed to poke a ball out of everybody's reach. Even this year, when I stayed up late for a Monday night game Angels vs. Yankees, I watched the dynamic:

Carew crouched like a Praying Mantis in double knit camouflage, waiting for Rudy May's offering. When he gnashed a double to left center to drive in a run, I just clapped in celebration at his precision.

An accuracy Carew has proudly developed and defended as the True Player's Gospel. A quote from the cover story on Carew in Black Sports, August 1977:

"Everyone wants to hit home runs. You see 150 pound guys coming up who swing so hard they screw themselves into the go ground. I think it's a macho thing. Guys don't think they're masculine unless they hit the long ball. It's been drummed into them since Little League that the power guys are superior because they get all the publicity and attention."

Small man's God

That philosophy has transformed Carew's singles into homers for we of the Royal Order of Check-Swing Singles. His seven AL batting crowns, including that miraculous .388 in 1977, when the baseball watching world held its breath as he courted .400 all year, have shocked us into standing up for our rights as ballplayers, who had a place in the big leagues — whether they be the pros or major college competition.

You see, Carew is the little player's God, because he has assessed his physical limits and still extended his talents — Giant-like. Carew made us all sigh smugly: "Take that!" we cried with his every clotheline to center, his every drag bunt toward first. To us — and his basically homeless approach to hitting let us know he agreed — Carew was mentor, whose spirit sensed the beauty of controlling a blazing fast ball with his bat.

From Black Sports again:

"I'm at the point where I can just about place a ball. You ask a pitcher and he'll tell you he fears a guy who can do that more than a home run hitter because he can milk the big guys. Nobody can set me up."

Lost, found again

Carew, rejecting the hissing funk of "Shaft's Theme" as he operated, proved that we could be most deeply satisfied when our performances forced silent, frustrated head nods from opposing pitchers and coaches. As for his due, the record shows Carew's satisfaction swells amidst quiet jazz, nights at the movies and the crispy rustling of his followers' riffs through the Sunday papers' leading hitters list.

Losing sight of the master during last year's season, I started my newsprint quest again this campaign — promising myself to keep track till season's end. Only to find his name sat upon by 23 water color names like Molitor, Remy, Molinaro, Yount, Nordhgen, Walhan, Oglivie . . . .

Oh, I can't go on with these labels of would be snatchers of Carew's earthly mantle.

Aw, he'll be back

Yes, yes, Tony Kubek acknowledges every Saturday that these new names are the Hitters' Wave marching ever on into the future, into a time when Rod Carew will be asterisked and forgotten by snotty-nosed pops Card traders (like Calvin Griffith).

But come fall this season, that march will step to a moving rhythm:

The crispy rustling of our Sunday fingers snapping upward — chasing Carew's name to the top of 1980's hitters list.

Unseld, Cain saluted

Nearly 1,500 pay tribute to stars

A near capacity crowd was on hand at Martin's West (Baltimore) Tuesday night at a testimonial dinner to Bullets captain Wes Unseld and former high school athletic director and coach William "Sugar" Cain.

Receipts from the affair went to continue the youth-oriented work of Project Survival, a local Urban Services Agency program.

The two were chosen and honored because of their long devotion to the building of athletic and academic strength among young boys and girls.

Included among the beneficiaries were two young high school graduates, Dwayne Wood and Wanda Johnson.

Both excelled on the basketball court and in the classroom during their scholastic careers. Both received $1,000 scholarships to colleges of their choice.

Wood is headed for Virginia State University and Johnson will enroll at Frostburg State in the fall.

Assorted testimonials and trophies were presented Unseld and Cain in recognition of their contributions to youth.

Among the presenters were Mayor Schaefer, Baltimore City Council president Walter Orlinsky, Bullets owner Abe Pollin, Morgan president Andrew Billingsley, and representatives of a portion of the nation's leading business world.

Both honorees acknowledged the salute with reminiscences of their own younger days.

Unseld shared the tribute with his wife, Connie, "who is easily the most important person in my life."

Cain's wife, Wahsiola, read the response for her blind husband.

SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS — Dwayne Wood and Wanda Johnson flank AFRO sports editor Sam Lacy, after receiving their Project Survival $1,000 scholarships at Martin's West Tuesday night. Both were rewarded for outstanding performances in basketball and classroom.

Unseld dad buried

LOUISVILLE — Washington Bullets center Wes Unseld was called home Saturday following the death of his father, Charles, who died earlier in the day of the last of a series of heart attacks.

The elder Unseld, 64, was buried Tuesday morning in Calvary Cemetery after being eulogized at 10 a.m. services at the local St. Boniface Catholic Church.

Ironically, the death occurred on the eve of Father's Day and three days before his son Westley was to be honored at a testimonial dinner in Baltimore.

Four other sons — including George Unseld, a one-time Kansas University cage star — survive, along with Mrs. Cornelia Unseld, the widow; two foster sons, two daughters and 13 grandchildren.

Were you counted? If not, call 396-1980

Old black stars set 2nd baseball reunion

ASHLAND, Ky., — On Monday, this tiny mountain town will become a mecca for surviving baseball stars of the old Negro National League.

A glittering montage of memories will enliven the second annual reunion of many of the greatest — yet least known — officials and ball players of the pre-1947 era.

Several dozen of the stars who played in virtual obscurity before baseball broke the color barrier will be on hand Monday and Tuesday to pay tribute to Effa Manley of Los Angeles, who co-owned the Newark (N.J.) Eagles and was the team's business manager.

Mrs. Manley was also active in baseball just after World War II when blacks began to play in the current National and American leagues

The reunion begins Monday with an evening reception for the stars at a hotel in nearby South Point, Ohio.

The players will meet reporters for pictures and interviews at the hotel and they will be at Ashland's Putnam Stadium for a similar session with the public. They will then attend the banquet in Ashland honoring Mrs. Manley.

The first black baseball player honored a year ago was Clinton Thomas, a Greenup, Ky., native who hit .350 over 19 years in the NNL. Thomas now lives in charleston, W. Va

Besides Thomas and Mrs. Manley, others planning to be on hand include Willie Mays, Satchel Paige, Buck Leonard, Willie Wells, Buck O'Neil, Don Newcombe, Ted Page, Leon Day, William "Judy Johnson, Ray Dandridge, Down Rogosin, Jimmie Crutchfield, Othello Renfroe, Joe Black, Dick Seay, Webster McDonald, Chet Brewer, Jake Stephens, Eugene Benson, Quincy Troupe and Monte Irwin, special assistant to baseball commissioner Bowie Kuhn.

Renfroe, now a broadcaster for WIGO radio in Atlanta, is master of ceremonies for the affair.

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