Jamaica’s Rich Boxing Heritage

Jamaica boasts a reasonable history in the sport of boxing.

For a country of just under 3 million persons it is without question that when we examined the data, Jamaica has produced or had a hand in producing some of boxing’s most memorable iconic stars. Among the list of pugilists are: Bunny Grant, Percy Hayles, Uriah Grant, Michael ‘the body’ snatcher McCallum, Richard ‘Shrimpy’ Clarke and the late Trevor Berbick, Donovan ‘razor Ruddock- who fought at the heights of his career for Canada, and the current Jamaican contenders Glen ‘road warrior’ Johnson, and World Boxing Association (W.B.A), Fede–Latin Champion Nicholas ‘the axe man’ Walters. The documented evidence of Jamaica’s extended success would include, but is not limited to, immense contributions by boxers of Jamaican parentage such as, Lennox Lewis, Frank Bruno and Audley Harrison. The 60’s Bunny Grant has the distinction of being the first Jamaican boxer to fight for a world title. He fought the American champion Eddie Perkins for the World Junior Welterweight boxing title at the National Stadium on April 18, 1964, but lost in a unanimous point’s decision. In 1962, Grant held as many as four titles simultaneously – the Latin American Junior Welterweight title, the British Empire Lightweight title (renamed the Commonwealth title) and the Jamaica Lightweight and Welterweight titles. During his heyday, the boxer, whose real name is George Leslie Grant, was not only a genuine crowd puller but a role model to young aspiring sportsmen as well as he was immensely popular. For his outstanding contribution to boxing, Bunny Grant was inducted to Jamaica’s Sports Hall of Fame on October 21, 1999. Percy Hayles who was sport man of the year in 1964, was a former World Ranked Lightweight fighter, perhaps not as entirely accomplished as Bunny Grant. The 70’s Boxing in Jamaica was vibrant, especially in the 1970s. In January 1973 the attention of the world was focussed on Jamaica when the country staged a World Heavyweight title fight between ‘Smokin’ Joe Frazier, the champion at the time and the young George Forman, the contender. Foreman shocked the world on that day. He won in the second round after knocking Frazier to the canvas six times before stopping him. The 80’s
Then came Mike McCallum in the era of the 1980’s. The ‘body snatcher’, as he was called, became a World Champion in 1984 by defeating Sean Mannion to win the vacant World Boxing Association (WBA) Junior Middleweight title, and went on to win world titles in three other weight classes, and has the distinction of never being knocked out in a fight. The success of Jamaica’s boxing was on par with or at times surpassed the accomplishments of its Caribbean neighbours, with many a talents being exposed and young fighters moving from amateur to pro in rapid succession. Through dinner boxing experiences thanks to Liu Shen Chen, Wille Yap, Al Hamilton and others, to many outdoor fights in the car park of the now defunct Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation (J.B.C), through Dennis Woodbine, the development and expansion of the sport was on sound footing. Many coaches and trainers from the local gyms of Dragon Gym, Jamaica Defence Force (J.D.F) to Guinness Gym and Dreamscape in the western belt, Jamaica’s name was fully etched in the annals of boxing locally, regionally, and internationally. In this period when the Jamaica boxing board was kept very busy, the sponsorship of Denoes and Geddes and other corporate supporters helped ensure the viability, and popularity of the sport. Today, through the faith of another corporate giant, Wray and Nephew with the popular Contender series, many local boxers who were unable to otherwise get a shot at national recognition are able to do so now live on TV. Given the respected tradition and the solid history behind the name Jamaica, the charge must now be made for all hands on deck in maintaining the solid tradition of Boxing. Source: Jamaicans.com