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SUGAR RAY LEONARD



By Nathan Rush • Cover and opening photography by Tim Mantoani

At 59 years old, Sugar Ray Leonard stays busy in Los Angeles with his wife, four children, three dogs, charity work, broadcasting and, of course, golf. We caught up with the man whose lofty ambitions led to an illustrious boxing career that includes winning an Olympic gold medal and becoming the first boxer to win world titles in five different weight classes.

“I tried to be like (Muhammad) Ali,” Leonard says. “I tried to be like Bruce Lee. I tried to be like Elvis Presley. I tried to be like Sugar Ray Robinson. I wanted to be more than just a boxer, but an entertainer and a star.”

[Q] Tell me about the Sugar Ray Leonard Foundation. First off, my father’s diabetic and I’ve come to see that my friends’ kids are diabetic. We’ve teamed up with Children’s Hospital Los Angeles, providing funds that go toward outreach programs so that those kids in inner cities can learn how to eat better. Show them how to exercise and show them things that are so simple yet so important in everyday lives. It’s very dear to me.

[Q] You beat Floyd Mayweather Sr. In your prime, could you beat Floyd Mayweather Jr.?

I did beat his father back in 1978. I was in Vegas a few weeks ago and (Floyd Jr.) walks up to me and we stand almost like nose-to-nose. He said, “Ray, in my era, I could beat you.” And I said, “You know what, man? In my era, I could beat you.” He looked at me and said, “I know you beat my father, but this is me.” I said, “Check this out. Like father, like son.”



[Q] What's it like being godfather to Khloe Kardashian? I've known that family since those girls, or those women were girls, were little girls. It's amazing how they've grown. But when I'm around them, it's always the privacy of our own surroundings.

[Q] How was competing on "Dancing with the Stars"? I would have preferred to fight (Marvin) Hagler and (Thomas) Hearns the same night. I've never been so scared in my life. But it was an experience. I really had fun.

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”

[Q] What was the transition like from fighter to ex-fighter? It took me maybe, I don't know, 10 years before I really finally got it out of my system. The fame and fortune is so seductive that you don't want to let it go. You always believe you have one more fight left in you. And that's the fault of most fighters, myself included.

[Q] Has broadcasting and being around the sport of boxing helped fill the void? Broadcasting with PBC (Premier Boxing Champions) on NBC, it's my life. I love the sport. I know the sport more than most. I've lived this thing, I've sweat this thing, I've bled this thing.

[Q] What are you doing to stay in shape these days? I still work out. I play tennis. I run. You have to work out. We train our hearts out for years. Our body is like a

machine, like a classic car. You train hard and you can't just quit. I love it. I truly love working out.

[Q] What do you wear while working out? Skechers. Memory foam. I love that shoe in particular. I'm a Skechers man.

[Q] Do you have any hobbies outside of working out? My golf. That is my hobby. That is my therapy. ... I played with President (Bill) Clinton. We had the best time. He said, "You tee off first." I'm like, "Wha-wha-wha-what?" And I held my club so tight and I said, "God, I don't call you that often, but please don't let me miss the ball." I swung and I hit the ball like 250 yards down the middle and I was like, "Holy cow." I shot my best round. I think I shot 41 on the front.

[Q] How did President Clinton play? Well, he kept taking mulligans.

[Q] Do you have any pets? Always. I love my dogs. I love my dogs big time. I've got a pit bull, a miniature schnauzer and a little Pekingese.

[Q] Looking back, what's your favorite memory in the ring? I've been blessed with so many. And I remember everything vividly. I vividly remember moments, even smells, whether it's the sweat or looking at my opponent in his eyes and he has a look like he's trying to kill me or trying to knock me out.

[Q] You were named after your mother's favorite musician, Ray Charles. Do you have a favorite Ray Charles song? He sang "America the Beautiful" at my "No Mas" fight against (Roberto) Duran. Of all the places for me to meet my namesake. With him singing, I said, "There's just no way, no way Duran can beat me tonight. Nobody can beat me tonight." He sang and



To read the entire interview, visit AthlonSports.com/SugarRay



he walks over to me and gave me a big kiss and says, "Kick his ass."

[Q] Any other brushes with greatness? I was in South Africa giving a speech, and Nelson Mandela was there. And they call my office and ask if I'll have dinner with him that night. I couldn't believe it. I went to his house and he opened the door and he gave me a big hug and said, "My champion, I love you. But one thing I don't tolerate is people being late." I just started sweating, right? I started sweating and then he said, "My photographer should have been here a long time ago." I thought he was talking about me. Those are the kind of moments and times that I've had because of the success I've had in boxing.



What do you think about Ronda Rousey?

She is a beast. She is special. She is different. She's a machine. She's such a tactician. She's so strong and she's so determined. And I love her. You look at her. She's pretty, but she's dangerous.