

So, the “City of Champions” is rightfully celebrating Marvelous Marvin Hagler this weekend. Well deserved in every way. A true champ.

He actually legally changed his first name to “Marvelous.” This in an age when his Middleweight classmates were the likes of “Sugar” Ray Leonard, Tommy “The Hitman” Hearns and Roberto “Hands of Stone” Duran. Not only a great bunch of sluggers but classic nicknames.

Every Sunday after church at St. Mark’s we’d go to the Falls Market for breakfast supplies. The Kahuna always let me pick out one magazine. And, I always picked out “Ring,” the Bible of boxing.

The Kahuna was always a fan of the Heavyweights. He’d seen the best of them. But one day I saw him in the Laz-E-Boy after brunch leafing through “Ring.”

“These guys are good,” he said, of the Middleweights, not looking up. “Tough and fast.”

He teased me, “You can follow Hearns (same skinny build as me, same first name, fought out of the Kronk, and even his second nickname was great: “The Motor City Cobra.”). “I’ll go with the local guy, Hagler. Hell, he was even born in Newark!”

It was an unspoken joy that I’d gotten my Kahuna to appreciate beyond the bruisers who fought Heavyweight. Because he had taught me to appreciate the “Sweet Science,” and I know I got to show him.

It was three days before my senior year birthday of high school. The Kahuna didn’t demand much other than the lawn being cut on me and never saying “No” when Ellen asked something. That night he made a request.

“You gonna’ watch the fight with me?”

My friends had all of kinds of plans. Teenagers did that in the 80’s when you could get away with it.

I thought for a split second and said, “Absolutely. You want me to go get us some beer?” He knew I had a fake ID and a local that didn’t even ask to see it anymore. Sometimes being tall helps.

“Nope,” he said. There’s a case of Buds in the garage. Grab a couple.” Ellen was busy with Crock pot meatballs and spaghetti on the stove in the kitchen.

She asked, “Are you staying for the fight?” With that sweet smile she always had that I will never forget. As a child in Newark she’d gotten closer to my grandfather watching the Friday nights. I told her I was and she smiled.

“He’ll never tell you, but he was hoping.”

So, the pre-fight coverage was almost done but the spaghetti beat it to the punch and the Kahuna called upstairs to my younger brothers.

“Dinner! And, it almost time!”

They both knew and came scrambling down the stairs. We never got to eat dinner in the den but this was an exception kinda like New Year’s Eve and Ellen admonished everyone, “I better not see any sauce anywhere but a plate! None on the carpet!” Then she smiled and looked at the Kahuna. “That means you, too! And, she grinned and got herself a plate just in time for the opening bell.

Then it was on.

Marvelous Marvin Haggler, it was unreal.

Neither holding back an inch. Back and forth, simply brutal. Ray Leonard was a commentator and I’ll always remember him saying, “These guys are not boxing, they’re fighting!”

Perhaps, the greatest first round ever fought. And Marvelous and Tommy gave my family that. I’ll never forget it. And, a guy from the Kronk with Emmauel Stewart in his corner and Marvelous Marvin Hagler from Brockton with Goody and Pat Pretonelli in his, guiding what they could.

Some say, “The greatest round of boxing in the modern era.” I agree.

I watched it with my family. Thank you, Tommy and thank you, Marvelous.

Watch it:

