



Bernie Lincicome

In the wake
of the news

Boxing tries to carry on

In time, we may all forget just what garment it was that Larry Holmes determined was too taxing for Rocky Marciano to carry, though to be completely fair about this, no one has actually weighed it. Maybe, in fact, not even Holmes himself can carry it and that is the reason he lost to Michael Spinks.

We must not suppose also that Rocky, were he alive and fit, would accept Holmes' dare as ample excuse to prove Holmes wrong. Anyone having handled such things knows that reasonable human beings are not inclined to pick up any that are not in their own wash.

Nevertheless, to satisfy all those affronted by Holmes' contention, we ought to have some exact numbers to work with, and know whether Holmes meant empty or full—that is, with or without the protective cup, some of which are portable and some of which are sewn right in.

I cannot imagine so much outrage had Holmes expressed doubt that Marciano could carry his jewelry, for Holmes does decorate himself with enough baubles when in three-piece street clothes to flatten a camel.

Rocky was given to open-necked shirts and occasionally wore a watch. To insinuate that Marciano was lacking in wardrobe would not have upset anyone and might have, in fact, been taken as a compliment among those immune to subtlety.

Holmes might also have suggested that his shoes, or his shoestrings, were potentially overwhelming, as well they might be except when new. His trunks and gloves were probably never considered as the standard of measurement to define both his and Marciano's places in history.

Marciano could not wear Holmes' trunks or shoes without padding, for he was, in fact, a much smaller man than Holmes.

Holmes chose to raise the issue over the one piece of athletic equipment that has never shown up on the Tale of the Tape, its being all the more mysterious in its invisibility. Holmes' ultimate contribution to boxing history may be to add to the statistics of future fights by creating a public demand to know what secrets are hidden beneath the Everlast.

Such impact on his sport is not exactly what Holmes had in mind when he entered the ring the other night, but he might still get out of his admitted embarrassment without being relegated in the catalog of great heavyweights somewhere behind Floyd Patterson and maybe just in front of Max Baer.

Holmes has recanted since offering his initial opinion, no doubt having looked around the variety of businesses he shepherds in Easton, Pa., and imagined the absence of grudge-carrying customers, some of whom may actually have seen one of those things up close.

Holmes must now do business with a world that has suffered his tortured insecurities because he was champion. Innkeepers and dry cleaners do not enjoy the same level of tolerance.

How long it will take Holmes to be forgiven is hard to say, for he had the misfortune of being caught live by cameras and microphones that instantly, or on tape delay, relayed his exact words into the nation's homes. There was no attempt by the press to camouflage his insult.

I'm not sure that was such a good idea. My experience with a similar incident is reason enough for caution.

In my youth in this business, I quoted a football quarterback from Florida as saying that a running back from Tennessee could not carry the strap of a running back from Florida.

In those less liberal days of newspapering, an editor altered the quote from what was actually said to "chin strap," satisfied that

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the change in utility of the equipment did not offend the reader nor diminish the impact of the opinion.

Still, the good citizens of Tennessee were offended by the quote, no matter how sanitized the search for good taste had made it. Thus, when Florida played a game later that year in Knoxville—and lost, incidentally—the crowd brought to the game thou-

sands of chin straps to toss at the quarterback during the game. By game's end, the field was littered from end zone to end zone with chin straps.

I have lived since with perpetual gratitude that the editor had not permitted the quote to go through as originally spoken and written.

I am absolutely convinced that had all the straps been swept into a pile after that game, not Marciano, Holmes and the Seven Santini Brothers together could have carried them.

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