

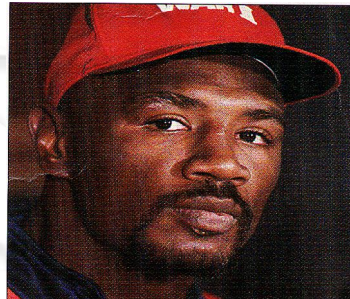
SPORTING LEGENDS: MARVIN HAGLER

SPORT: BOXING

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1973 - 1987

Marvelous Marvin Hagler (born Marvin Nathaniel Hagler in Newark, New Jersey May 23, 1954), a native of Brockton, Massachusetts, was one of the most successful Middleweight Boxing Champions of all-time.

Total fights	67
Wins	62
Wins By KO	52
Losses	3
Draws	2



Hagler started his professional boxing career in 1973, and soon began working his way up through the Middleweight rankings. He often had to travel to his opponents' hometowns to get fights, often boxing against the best that the city of Philadelphia had to offer (and beating them).

Hagler took on all challengers, and by 1976 had chalked up a 26-0 record. However, during the same year he lost controversial decisions to Willie Monroe and Bobby 'Boogaloo' Watts, and had to suffer while watching less-deserving challengers receive title shots against Carlos Monzon and Hugo Corro.

This served for Hagler to build upon a character that was as tough as steel, but with a soft spot in his heart toward his fans. Hagler soon avenged his 2 defeats by knocking out Monroe and Watts in rematches, and won a 10-round decision over Bennie Briscoe in a 1978 classic Philadelphia confrontation. By this time, he had made fans in both Massachusetts and Philadelphia, two of boxing's legendary hot-beds.

By then, promoter Bob Arum, a lawyer who had helped in the White House during President John F. Kennedy's tenure, took notice and signed him. Arum raised Hagler's public profile and finally, in November 1979, Hagler was in the ring with a world Middleweight champion.

Vito Antuofermo gave Hagler a shot, and the fight turned into a Middleweight classic. One of the greatest championship bouts in Middleweight history was unfortunately marred by controversy, and Hagler had to settle for a draw or tie. This only added to Hagler's frustrations.

SPORTING LEGENDS: MARVIN HAGLER

Antuofermo lost his title later to Alan Minter, who became the 2nd champion to be brave enough to defend his title against the Brockton menace.

Hagler went to London in 1980 and beat Minter in 3 rounds at the Wembley Arena. At the conclusion of this bout a riot broke out, and Hagler and his trainers had to be carried away to their locker rooms by the police, in the middle of a rain of beer bottles and glasses. Hagler was furious at not having the chance to be awarded his belt in the ring.



Alan Minter fought bravely enough, but Hagler taught him a painful boxing lesson.

Hagler proved a busy world champion, and went on to have 12 successful title defenses. First of all, he defeated future world champion Fulgencio Obelmejias (1981) by a knockout in 8, and then former world champ Antuofermo (1981) in a rematch by knockout in 5, both at the Boston Garden.

Mustafa Hamsho (1981) followed, and he was beaten in 11 punishing rounds. William Caveman Lee lasted only 1 round (1982), and in a rematch in Italy, Obelmejias (1982) lasted only 5 rounds.

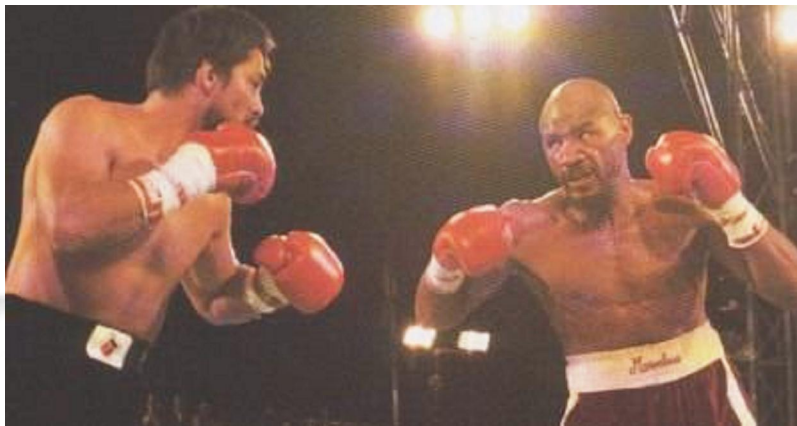
British champion Tony Sibson followed in Hagler's list of unsuccessful challengers (1983), falling in 6, and then Wilford Scypion was KO'd in 4.



Tony Sibson was a tough opponent, but nowhere near Hagler's class.

SPORTING LEGENDS: MARVIN HAGLER

By 1983, Hagler was a staple on HBO, which was the Pay Per View of its time. A superfight vs Roberto Duran followed and Duran was the first challenger to last the distance with Hagler in a world championship bout, but he lost a unanimous 15 round decision.



Many boxing experts believe that Roberto Duran was never the same after this fight.

Then came Juan Roldan (1984), who became the only man to drop Hagler, scoring a knockdown seconds into the fight, but Hagler got angrier and proceeded to beat Roldan, stopping him in 10.

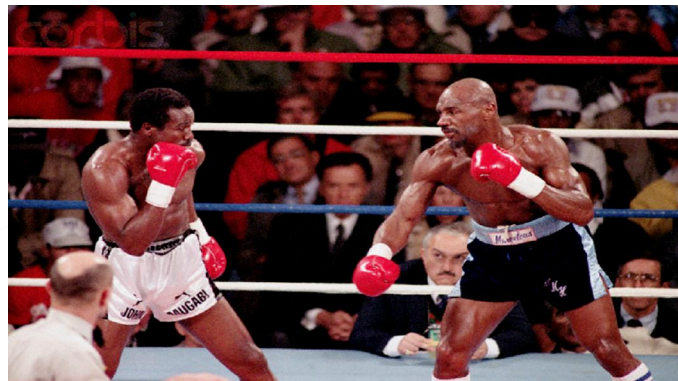
Hamsbo was given a rematch (1984) and lost in 3, and then in 1985, Hagler and Thomas Hearns met in what was billed as 'The Warq In a sensational slugfest, Hagler survived one of the best first rounds in history and won by an electrifying 3 round KO.



Hagler's superfight with Thomas Hearns was an absolute classic!

SPORTING LEGENDS: MARVIN HAGLER

Next was John "The Beast" Mugabi (1986), a thunderous puncher who was 26-0 with 26 knockouts. Hagler took Mugabi's best shots and came back handily, stopping Mugabi in the 11th in what would turn out to be his last successful defense.



For many boxing experts, Hagler's fight against Mugabi was his toughest title defence.

After his defence vs Hearn and before his fight with Mugabi, Hagler changed his name legally to *Marvelous Marvin Hagler* and made a few commercials, most notably a commercial for Pizza Hut and later Gillette. He enjoyed his fame and relished the fact that after so many years in the background, he was finally a household name.

The Mugabi fight took a lot out of Hagler, with both fighters urinating blood after the bout. Hagler may have eventually out-classed Mugabi in the 11th round, but Hagler had to take some tremendous shots to the mid-section in the process. In the post-fight interview with ESPN Sports Network, Hagler indicated that this would probably be his last fight.

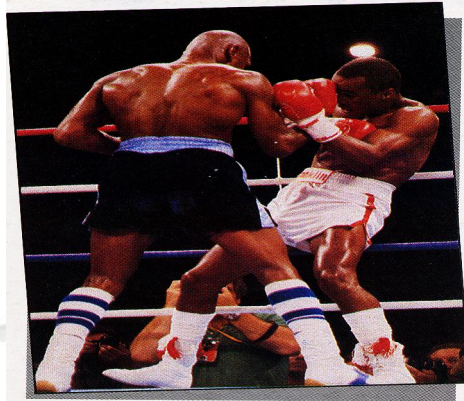
By this time, Hagler had already achieved 12 title defences and beaten all of the best fighters in the Middleweight division. The only fight he was interested in taking was a superfight with Sugar Ray Leonard, which Leonard had always denied him.

After endless bouts of financial negotiations and legal wrangling, a promotional package entitled **The Showdown** was agreed. The fight was scheduled for **6th April 1987**, to be held at **Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas, Nevada**.

The concessions of the fight package were certainly worth considering. Hagler agreed for the fight to take place in Las Vegas, in return for the greatest share of the fight income (\$14 million).

However, when Leonard agreed to take the minority share of the fight purse (\$6 million), he also insisted on various contract clauses.

SPORTING LEGENDS: MARVIN HAGLER



Leonard had the better start, but Hagler controlled the later rounds of *The Showdown*

These concessions included: shortening the fight from a scheduled 15-round fight to a **12-round bout** (to guarantee WBC sanction), **10-ounce thumbless gloves**, a **larger ring size** and a **NO REMATCH OPTION**.

The Showdown turned out to be a great fight, with the outcome being one of the most controversial and talked-about results in boxing history. After 12 energy-sapping rounds, Sugar Ray Leonard was awarded the victory by Split-Decision, much to the delight of the Las Vegas crowd.

Hagler felt that he had won the fight, and done enough to keep his belt. Leonard's victory was extremely popular with the American public, but from a purely boxing perspective - many boxing critics thought that Hagler was the victor.

He thought his decision loss to Leonard was undeserved, and quit boxing (after being refused a rematch) tired of the backroom politics of the sport.



Hagler was inducted into the International Boxing Hall Of Fame in 1993

SPORTING LEGENDS: MARVIN HAGLER



Scott Burton's Final Thought

Marvin Hagler's rise to prominence in the boxing world was made possible through a combination of perseverance, determination, talent and sheer hard graft. No doubt he was one of the greatest fighters ever to lace up a pair of gloves.

It is always gratifying to see the stereotypical rags-to-riches storyline coming true every once in a while, and Marvin Hagler deserved everything he achieved in his career.

I am a big fan of Hagler, and believe he was the best fighter of his generation. He went on to hold this title for nearly seven years with twelve successful defences. It was a healthy era of middleweight boxing, with many tough and talented opponents who would have been world champions themselves in any other era. But Hagler's greed for the title was just relentless.

Boxing fans like to argue about who were the greatest champions of all time. Would Hagler have beaten Sugar Ray Robinson? Jake La Motta? Carlos Monzon? In truth, it's not that simple. No one champion is black-and-white better than another.

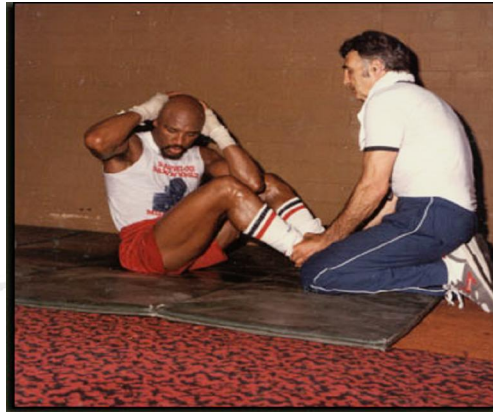
There is no doubt that Hagler was one of the best middleweight champions ever. He was the perfect fighting machine. Lean. Mean. Extremely skilful. His fast fists and quick-witted movement combined with perfect posture, poise and balance to make him a hard hitter who could fight on the advance or the retreat; who could go to war on the inside or box from the outside with precision and cutting stiffness.

He switched between southpaw and orthodox styles to confuse his opponents, and didn't rely on just a singularly powerful punch. His ability to punch in combinations earned him a very high knockout ratio. He could fight for fifteen rounds and proved himself capable of taking even the biggest of punches without flinching.

I have watched all 67 of Hagler's fights on DVD / VHS, and they were all impressive in one-way or another. He was never stopped or knocked down throughout his career (the dubious slip against Juan Roldan in 1984 doesn't count as a knock-down in my opinion) and to achieve 52 KOs is an incredible achievement.

It's also interesting, in retrospect, to notice the dodgy judging that was involved in all 3 of Hagler's defeats. I've objectively watched the footage from Hagler's 1976 fight against Bobby Boogaloo Watts countless times, and I still can't see how the judges gave the Majority Decision to Watts - it's absurd! Certainly it seemed as if the judges from Philadelphia didn't want to see Hagler win, for whatever political reason.

SPORTING LEGENDS: MARVIN HAGLER



Hagler's conditioning routines were prepared by Goody Petronelli - one of the best.

A similar miscarriage of justice occurred with Hagler's bout with Willie Monroe (also in 1976). The video footage clearly shows Hagler landing the cleaner shots and generally getting the better of his opponent, yet the Philadelphia judges gave a Unanimous Decision to Monroe. Such shoddy decisions have to be for political reasons, because they surely can't have been for boxing reasons.

Nevertheless, a true mark of a champion is how they react to being defeated, and Hagler came back to defeat both Bobby Watts and Willie Monroe in stunning style.

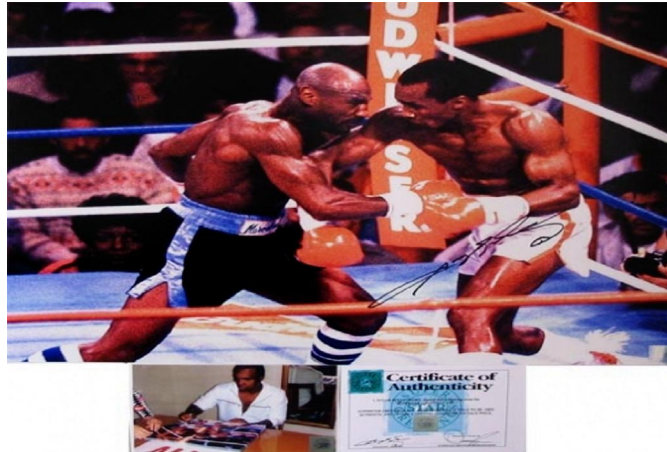
The final fight of Hagler's career was the superfight against Sugar Ray Leonard, which was one of the most eagerly-awaited fights in the history of boxing. Leonard had been a dazzling welterweight and light middleweight champion in the early 1980s. He was the only other fighter to have beaten Thomas Hearns but had been inactive for three years.

It was for this reason that the experts gave Leonard little chance of defeating Hagler. But Leonard had a plan. He reckoned that with Hagler's now-advancing years he could steal a good points lead by putting all his energy into the first few rounds.

All he needed to do was keep that up for as long as possible, and then do just enough to keep the lead once established. He insisted on a larger ring so he could circle more widely and escape Hagler. He insisted on the shorter twelve round distance. He made Hagler wait a year, to ensure he would decline even more and get ring-rusty, and he taunted Hagler to get him to fight Leonard's kind of fight.

As if a student of Sun Tzu (*The Art of War*), Leonard was smart enough to ensure he'd won the fight before the first bell rang by capturing the advantage in the relevant warring principles - moral influence, terrain, command and doctrine. It all worked. Hagler started the bout fighting orthodox style, and arguably gave away the first four rounds trying to box with Leonard - before coming on strong from round five onwards.

SPORTING LEGENDS: MARVIN HAGLER



Leonard started brilliantly, using speed and evasive tactics to frustrate Hagler, and arguably won the first 4 rounds with his jab and move strategy.

In Round 5, Leonard (inevitably) started to tire, and Hagler began to catch Leonard more and more with his punches. Even though Leonard remained elusive and clearly took round six, Hagler controlled the pace right up to the end of the fight.

During Round 12, Leonard was all but out on his feet. Hagler still looked fresh and was hitting Leonard from every angle. Overall, it was a very close fight indeed.

The result came down to a split decision:

Judge 1 (**Lou Filippo**) scored the fight **115-113** in favour of **Hagler**.

Judge 2 (**Jose Guerra**) scored the fight **118-110** in favour of **Leonard** (get serious!!)

Judge 3 (**Dave Moretti**) scored the fight **115-113** in favour of Leonard, and the Sugar Man had pulled off one of the greatest shocks in boxing history!

The decision was close and hotly disputed by fans. Many felt Hagler had done enough to eliminate Leonard's early lead, but many others protested the decision was just.

I scored the fight 116-114 in Hagler's favour. Nevertheless, Hagler finally lost his title. A rematch was justified but Leonard denied it. Hagler would probably have regained the title had the rematch been granted, but without the opportunity he chose to retire.

True to his word, he never returned to the ring. A true sporting legend, Marvin Hagler richly deserves his place in the International Boxing Hall Of Fame.