



FORCED INTO THE RING - THE MIRACLE NATION TRIUMPHS AGAINST ALL ODDS

LUIS CASTILLO VS DIEGO CORRALES

Las Vegas, Nevada, May 7, 2005, is etched into boxing history.

José Luis Castillo and Diego Corrales squared up to one another.

The fighters traded blows, battering each other through the rounds. Corrales had welts under both of his eyes and his left eye started to swell shut in the seventh round. Through round nine, neither man had been knocked down. Less than 30 seconds into the tenth round, Castillo connected with Corrales's chin and knocked him down. Seconds later, Castillo knocked Corrales down again. It appeared that it was all over. When the fight resumed, Corrales, who had been all but written off, suddenly hooked Castillo with a punch that Castillo later called "a perfect right hand". Corrales then trapped

Castillo against the ropes and landed numerous punches that seemed to knock Castillo out while still on his feet. The referee stopped the fight and extraordinarily, from the depths of certain defeat, Corrales was victorious.

MUHAMMED ALI VS GEORGE FOREMAN



The World Title bout held in Kinshasa, Zaire, was billed as the 'The Rumble in the Jungle'.

Foreman was a two-time World Heavyweight Champion. He'd knocked down the mighty Joe Frazier five times before taking the World Title. Foreman was feared for his ferocious strength and the power of his punch. He was the 4 to 1 favourite. Ali used brilliant tactics as he began to lean on the ropes and cover up, letting Foreman punch him on the arms and body (a strategy Ali later dubbed the 'rope-a-dope'). It was a brutal few early rounds. Ali parried and blocked blow after blow and occasionally managed to land direct

and effective jabs to Foreman's face. Foreman powered on relentlessly. After five rounds, Foreman was visibly tired, sapped of strength from the sheer quantity of punches he'd thrown. As the fight drew into the eighth round, Foreman's punching began to lose velocity, and Ali pounced – landing several right hooks, followed by a five-punch combination and eventually, he threw a hard right that caused Foreman to drop. Round after round Ali had taken the punches, had stuck it out and, when Foreman eventually couldn't keep going, Ali rose to strike – and won.

MIKE TYSON VS BUSTER DOUGLAS

Tyson was the undefeated, undisputed heavyweight world champion. He held the WBC, WBA, and IBF titles. He'd never been knocked down let alone defeated by anyone. So lethal, his fights generally ended very quickly as he unleashed his fury on his opponents.

Douglas was ranked as #7 by Ring Magazine and the odds saw him as a 42-1 underdog. His mother, with whom he was deeply bonded, had died 23 days before the fight. Prior to her death, during the build up to the bout, in an impassioned statement, his mom insisted that he could beat Tyson.

Everyone expected a TKO in the very early round/s, but Douglas came out and held his own. Tyson couldn't find his usual explosiveness as Douglas weaved, blocked and stymied him. A series of good rounds saw Tyson behind on points.

Eighth Round: Within the last ten seconds Tyson showed his metal as he landed a big right uppercut. Douglas dropped and as the count was almost reached, the bell saved him.

Round 9: Tyson came all out to try end it, but Douglas rallied and hit Tyson with a four-punch combination. Tyson staggered. Douglas tried to use the momentum to seal the fight but Tyson somehow remained standing.

Round 10: As Tyson advanced, Douglas measured him with

a few jabs before landing an uppercut – stopping Tyson in his tracks. Tyson reeled back, and Douglas finished him off, knocking Tyson down – the first time ever in his career. Tyson didn't get up.

Despite Tyson not being in prime condition in the lead up to the fight, the fight is widely regarded as one of the biggest upsets in boxing history. Post the fight, Douglas expressed that it was his mom – her confidence in him, her presence in his heart, that inspired and carried him to victory.

THE JEWISH PEOPLE

David, the King of Israel, prays in his Psalms, "One request I ask of you G-d, let me reside in the house of Hashem all the days of my life". King David refers to the house of study and prayer - the natural habitat of the Jew – not to a boxing ring or the plains of war.



The Jewish Nation has never been a nation of fighters by trade or choice. On the contrary, they are a people who value and pursue the ways of peace and harmony. They are the 'people of the book', who utilise the 'mouth' and not the 'fist' to negotiate arguments and conflicts - "the voice is the voice of Jacob".

But the Jewish People have been forced into the ring and have had no option but to defend themselves to stop the unrelenting attacks against them. Contrary to Jewish nature, they have had to 'take up the glove' and face the tormentors that have historically tried to KO them.

When such moments have arisen however, the Jewish People have girded their loins, prepared for combat and beseeched G-d (Psalm 144:1): "Praise be to G-d, my Rock, Who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle."

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I have chosen the above three boxing matches to reflect on aspects of the fights that the Jewish People have had to contend with throughout history. Forced fights that continue still today.

ALI/FOREMAN

'Rumble in the Jungle' denotes a sense of foreboding in a dark and ominous environment, 'the jungle'. It can be said metaphorically that the Jewish People have been, for the last 2000 years, 'rumbling in a jungle', facing adversaries that were mighty, barbaric and bestial.

They have soaked up punches by empires beside whom they were dwarfed: the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Romans, the Crusaders, under Muslim conquest, the Spanish Inquisition, Stalin, the pogroms and in every blood soaked country in Europe and the Eastern Bloc. The list is never ending.

Repeatedly up against the ropes, the Jewish People have taken a heavy beating - absorbed an incalculable amount of pain and devastation. But somehow, they have managed to weave, bob and deflect just enough to stay on their feet, just enough to face another round, and another.

With an indomitable spirit and will to survive, the Jewish People held-on through these ordeals of persecution. And as the fights of history against them wore-on, remarkably their enemies began to tire and fall, one by one, while, incredulously, they remained standing. To quote the famous novelist Mark Twain: "All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?"

CASTILLO/CORRALES

When World War 2 ended, 6 million Jews, 40% of the Jewish population, had been exterminated.

Surely it was just a matter of time before this smallest of ethnic groups, geographically scattered, would fall entirely?

On 14 May 1948, Israel declared its Independence – the modern day State of Israel was born. The population of only 600 000 Jews was surrounded by 50 million Arabs bent on their destruction. On that day, the fledgling nation, comprising holocaust survivors, pioneers and generations of pious dwellers, was immediately attacked by five Arab nations. The Arabs had overwhelming advantages in population, arms, strategic depth and operational opportunities.

Logically, it should have been an inevitable KO. But the Jewish People have never been defined by convention and logic when it comes to their survival. Extraordinarily and against all odds, Israel won that round in 1948. It was to be the first of several incredible military victories.

As the 1967 Six Day War loomed – graves were being dug across Israel in advance of the anticipated mass fatalities. Four armies, which when combined tallied a force double the size of Israel's and which possessed far more advanced technology, tanks, aircraft and munitions, prepared to attack Israel. Israel preemptively struck with such speed, accuracy and tactical genius that she won the war in six days.



After the Six Day War, the tide-change accelerated as Israel grew strong, confident, empowered and would hit back multifold for every jab or punch thrown at her. While threats loomed, Israel had a grip on, and a supremacy over, her enemies. One opponent however, the Goliath of all, caused her to shudder with its dire threats of a nuclear attack coupled with an openly expressed intent to wipe her out. In the 11th hour of the bout, she took the fight to her enemy. The fighter with the blue

and white trunks crouched, and then rose like a lion, pouncing with precision-targeted strikes that neutralised her opponent. Had she waited any longer, it might have been too late. From a position of facing annihilation, Israel reset the playing field. Again she stood, while again her enemy fell.

TYSON/DOUGLAS

From time immemorial and through her long history, the Jewish Nation has generally been the underdog.

If the odds for Douglas were 42-1 against mighty Mike Tyson, I think it is reasonable to suggest that throughout the vicissitudes of history, the Jew was infinitely more unlikely to prevail in a world inhabited by so many formidable and powerful nations, of which a great many were fuelled by an intense hatred of the Jewish People. But ...

Reflecting on Buster Douglas ... Douglas had in his consciousness the spirit of his beloved mother – an internal whisper she'd spoken, that he could beat Tyson. This galvanised him and he went on to defy the 42 to 1 odds by beating Tyson.

Every Jew is a unique conduit for the Spiritual Force that accompanies him through every moment of his existence, and every Jew is able to tap into this Force in moments of extreme challenge.

Our exalted patriarchs and matriarchs might long have passed on – but they never died. They are as alive within us as is every fibre of our being, and they are watching over their children at every given moment. They breathe strength, defiance, pride and resilience into every Jewish heart and soul. And at those moments in which a mighty foe presents itself against them, they lean in and are able to hear the voices of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov; of Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah. They are invigorated and, against all conceivable odds, they prevail, vanquishing their enemies.

Yaakov Shwekey in his magnificent song, 'We are a Miracle' has a stanza towards the end of the song:

'Every day we fight a battle, on the news we are the stars, as history repeats itself and makes us who we are, hate is all around us, but we'll be here to sing this song.. We are a miracle ...'

Dedicated to my grandfather Mark Balkind z'l who was the Boxing Champ in his army corps during WW2. A man about whom the esteemed accolade was attributed, that of being a 'Baal Shem Tov' - 'Master/Owner/ Possessor of A Good Name'.

