

elaine cheney (time inc)
fm: lionel martin, havana

here is the stephenson piece for time. please add 25 dollars to my pay for two telex messages not sent on credit card (which is ~~not~~ end of month. cheers/

teofilo stephenson
notes for biosketch
by lionel martin (havana)

May 4 1984

WR 297

stephenson is a cuban national hero, a superstar known to every man, woman and child on this island. three time olympic heavyweight champ and two-time world amateur boxing title holder, teofilo stephenson at thirty-three years of age is facing the biggest challenge of his life -- he battle to win his fourth straight olympic gold medal in los angeles.

the +giant from las tunas+ (the town in eastern cuba he was born and raised in), who u.s. amateur boxing czar robert surkin once called +the greatest amateur boxer of all times+ began slipping following his triumph at the moscow olympics in 1980.

cuban sports' writers attribute his downhill spin to a bout with depression following the painful and lingering death by cancer of his jamaican born father in 1981. he went into slump and there were those, cuban among them, who said stephenson was over the hill and should hang up his gloves.

in 1981 he lost to ulli kaden in halle, east germany by disqualification after he hit his opponent below the belt three time. it was the first time stephenson, a clean and accurate puncher, has done such a thing. cuban, who knew teofil whispered that it was a sign of weak preparation and blamed it on his long vigils at his father's bedside and the ensuing depression following his father's death.

the whispers became sotto voce after he lost to italian francesco damiani in the world amateur boxing semi-finals in munich 1982. the criticism became open and sometimes derisive after he lost to craig payne in houston although the cubans thought the 2-3 decision against stephenson was unjust. last year, also, he lost to soviet boxer alexandr krupkin in the local cordova cardin competition. krupkin outclassed stephenson and irreverently broke through stephenson's defensive jabs to punish the champ from close in.

while some suggested that he retire, stephenson himself scoffed at the idea. +you can't win them all,+ he said and then began training with renewed enthusiasm. he is now on the comeback trail and motivated as never before to grab the prize in california. +a gold in los angeles will bring greater meaning to my life because its not the first but the fourth,+ he told a reporter.

he is still overweight and despite recent successes has not shown the speed and dynamite right that made opponents quake in olden days. but those who have watched him closely over past months say he is showing greater aggressiveness and motivation than in many a year.

his competitor spur him on. In an open letter in the cuban newspaper, juventud rebelde, said to stevenson: to obtain a fourth medal in the heart of yankee imperialism, to see our flag raised and hear our national anthem played there means a new victory for all our people.+

since january, stevenson has trounced three top international ly known heavyweight amateurs: piotr skok in halle, east germany, tyrell biggs in reno and italian baglio chianese in los angeles in mid april.

alcides sagarra, the cuban trainer who has raised his islands boxing team to the top of the list, believes that the more competition teofilo has before the olympics, the better. one of the champs problems over the past three years has been his too few bouts, many against second rate fighters, and the hard fact that he has no decent sparring partners on the tropical isle. when cuba's number two heavyweight, angel milian, retired in 1981, the last of the local men that could and would exchange blows with teofilo was gone. milian was never afraid of stevenson even when other men feared the cuban with the put-away wallop. milian, some believe, might have been one of the greatest in his own right if he had not been unlucky enough to coincided with stevenson. while the russian visotsky beat stevenson n milian zapped the russian three times during his career.

stevenson trains hard and hopes to be in top form by olympic time. he joggles as the sun come up at a training ranch on the outskirts of havana. then he put in hours in the gym under the expert direction of alcides sagarra. fighting buffs in cuba notice a tougher and more aggressive stevenson.

even if stevenson wins the gold at los angeles, nobody will offer him a million dollars to turn professional as they did a decade ago. according to a cuban photographer who was accompanying the cuban olympic team in munich in 1972, teofilo was offered a million dollars to turn pro in the united states and was taken to a hotel room where a n open suitcase lay on a bed filled with high denomination greenbacks.

stevenson views the offers made to him to leave cuba as politically motivated although he is aware than lot's of money would have been made if he had gotten into the ring with mohammed ali. stevenson's answer to the men who offered him the bundle of bills to turn pro was: +i would never trade nine million cubans for one million dollars.+

while stevenson's stiff posture, deadpan face and strained public smile give many the impression of certain arrogance, those who know his life style call him the simplest and kindest of men.

when a sports writer visited him at his modest apartment in havana recently he found the television set on the floor. +why don't you get a stand for it,+ the reporter asked him. stevenson reported: +i see it fine just as it is.+ the writer says that stevenson's soviet made lada was dirty outside and messy inside. he said stevenson is not caught up in material things and he is as likely as not ready to literally give you the shirt off his back if you praise it.

3
stevenson got married for the first time at 31 years of age. his wife is a teacher of gymnastic dance and they have a two month old girl. they have no maid but sometimes use a baby sitter when the grandma is not available. teofilo often does the cooking, something unusual for the typical cuban macho man. his favorite dish is something he learned to make from his mother - "caldosa", made of root vegetables, plantain bananas and chicken - ground up and served as a thick soup.

at 33 boxing is stevenson's only saleable skill, nurtured by close to 300 local and international bouts with only 14 defeats. he is studying towards a university degree at the higher school of physical education in havana and his future will be linked to sports and boxing.

while a lot of people will be rooting for teofil in l.a., there are those who would like to see him lose. +in los angeles teofilo will have to win in a convincing manner, the only way to avoid doubtful decision, + a cuban sports official said.

stevenson has come a long way since he lost to duane bobick in the 1971 panamerican games in cali. he still pays tribute to bobick who he thinks was his most difficult opponent ever. steven feels he can take on and beat any of the present crop of heavyweights and he will try to prove it in los angeles.

end end end end end lionel martin (havana) end end end end end

nn

correction: read stevenson where i write se stephenson (stephenson was the inventor of the steam railroad)

received 9(9(?????

ok elaine?????????????

0022.4

ga