

Anatomy Of A Tragedy Philly Boxer Fights For Life

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Vital fluids drained into Randy Jenkins's outstretched arms from bottles suspended on poles next to his hospital bed. A gauze turban covered the wound left by a team of neurosurgeons when they burrowed deep into his bruised brain to save his life.

The quiet cadence of an accordionlike apparatus at the top of a life- sustaining respirator was the only sound. His family was with him, but the only other signs of life in room 1274 were the rhythmic contractions of Jenkins's induced breathing and the squiggly lines on a monitor that tracked his vital signs.

He didn't look like a fighter. A picture on the wall that showed him striking a fighting pose was the only indication that he had ever been in the ring - that picture and the brain injuries that have left him suspended between life and death.

"His condition is still critical," Hahnemann University Hospital spokeswoman Phyllis Fisher said last night. "He is on a respirator and his condition is being monitored by doctors and intensive care nurses."

Except to squeeze his sister's hand yesterday, Jenkins has not moved a muscle since Tuesday night, when he complained of being tired and rolled over to rest on a back-room training table at the Blue Horizon. The 25-year-old middleweight, a North Philadelphia native now living on Provident Street in Mount Airy, had just lost a four-round majority decision to Darrell Underwood. It had been a competitive fight by all accounts.

"The crowd was on its feet at the end," promoter J Russell Peltz said. "It wasn't as if it had been a one-sided fight. It was a decision. He won the first round and lost the last three.

"He was getting hit. But there were no knockdowns. He didn't seem to be hurt."

"It was a real good fight, toe to toe the whole way" said Frank Talent, an inspector with the Pennsylvania Athletic Commission, which regulates boxing in the state. "After the fight ended, the ring announcer said, 'Let's hear it for these two gladiators.' And the crowd responded."

"He was fighting back all the way," Underwood's trainer, Wesley Mouzon, agreed. "Every time Darrell hit him with something good, he'd come firing right back.

"But he took some bad punches in there. A couple of times he got staggered. He didn't show it that much, but I could tell he got hurt."

"It was so close," said Jenkins's brother, Bobby, 24, an undefeated middleweight, "that I thought Randy won the fight, to tell you the truth. I thought he could have won the decision. My brother can fight.

" . . . He didn't seem too hurt in the locker room after the fight. But he could have been hurting and didn't want me to know it.

"I fought the same guy and beat him last September. But I'm the younger brother. I followed his footsteps into the ring. So he could have been hiding it from me how bad he was hurt.

" . . . He sat there for a while. Then he told me his head hurt and he wanted me to give him one of the Stanbacks (non-prescription painkiller) he had in his bag. I gave it to him and got him a glass of water and he took one.

"Then I got him another glass of water. The other fighter came in and wished him luck and everything. Then he wanted another glass of water.

"He started rubbing his nose and he said, 'Bob, I'm tired, I'm going to lay down.' By the time I got back, maybe 30 or 40 seconds later with the third cup of water, he was asleep on the table.

"I pushed him and said, 'Randy, wake up.' But he wouldn't answer me. Then, I could see his eyes looked funny. One of them was laying to the side and one was kind of rolled back.

"This guy from Underwood's corner was standing out there, so I said come and take a look at my brother. He ran and got the ring doctor. The ring doctor right away said call an ambulance."

"I was somewhere in the building, I think I was paying one of the other fighters when they called me," Peltz said. "The doctor was already in the room. The fighter looked unconscious.

"The ambulance got there about three to five minutes later. The brother and the doctor got in and rode with him to the hospital. That's the first time I realized that they were brothers.

"I was out in the hall taking a smoke," said Gary Hegyi, who manages John David Jackson, the fighter who won the main event later that night. "I heard all this confusion and then I saw them bring him out on the stretcher.

"I couldn't believe it. I only saw the first round of their fight, but the kid Jenkins looked like he won that round to me.

" . . . My kid's fight was coming up. Luckily, I had him in a room with a

closed door. He didn't know what was going on. I didn't want him to know. If somebody had come in there talking about it, I would have shut him up."

For Peltz, it was deja vu. Nearly nine years earlier, he had promoted a four-rounder at the Blue Horizon between Curtis Parker and Jodie White. White left the ring under his own steam after

the fourth-round TKO and went back to his dressing room. He lay down on a training table and never regained consciousness.

"That was March, 1978," Peltz said. "It was just like this. I couldn't help thinking about it when this happened.

"White complained that he was tired. He laid down, and the next thing I know, they're rushing him to the hospital. He died not long after that.

" . . . At the time, I wondered if I had made a bad match. Parker was 3-0 and White was 0-1. He had lost to Frank Fletcher. He was taking a pounding

from Parker, though. The referee stopped it in the fourth. I remember wondering why his corner men didn't stop it sooner.

"But this was a more even match. Jenkins was 3-3 and Underwood was 0-2. He had lost to Jersey James Green and to this kid's brother, Bobby.

"When I got to the hospital Tuesday night, I asked the doctors why it happened to this fighter. I thought maybe it could have been some old injury. But the doctors said a CAT scan showed that he didn't have any previous injury."

Bobby Jenkins had an idea why it happened to his brother.

"He shouldn't have been in that ring," Bobby Jenkins said. "My brother didn't do no training for this fight. He wasn't in any kind of shape.

"He didn't go near the gym. He wasn't in the gym at all before this fight. Maybe he ran a little bit up East River Drive or something. But he didn't do no training.

"How he got into it was a man named Johnny Barr. Johnny Barr should never have got him that fight. He knew Randy wasn't in training. He was licensed to fight in New York. He didn't fight down here.

"There wasn't nobody there that cared about my brother. He didn't have any manager in Philadelphia or any trainer. I didn't see Johnny Barr in that room when he got sick."

Barr could not be reached for comment yesterday. Last year, testifying under immunity before the New Jersey Commission of Investigation, he acknowledged that on at least one occasion - a 1984 fight between Ron Cooper and Murray Frasier in Atlantic City - he had lined up a fighter (Cooper) to "take a dive, but do it gracefully."

The Jenkins brothers' father, Rudolph Jenkins, said he didn't know his oldest son was still a fighter until a neighbor ran into his grocery store- grill at 18th and Jefferson as he was closing up late Tuesday night.

"They told me my son was carried out of the fights on a stretcher," Rudolph Jenkins said. "I said, 'It couldn't be,' because I know Bobby wasn't supposed to fight until the 27th.

"Then they said it was Randy. But how could Randy be in a fight when he hadn't been doing no training or nothing?

"Later, my daughter called me up and told me he was in the hospital. I rushed right down there then.

"But how could they let him fight? Don't you have to be in training? Can anybody just go in the ring and get into a fight?

"I knew he was a fighter. He was the first one to start back when he was 14. He kept getting beat up, so he went into the gym to learn to fight. His brother followed him.

"I know his brother used to pick him up sometime and take him to the gym with him just to keep in shape. But that was a long time ago. I can't see how they let somebody like him slip through. The result is he's in a coma."

Peltz, who said Jenkins and Underwood were examined by a doctor at a weigh-in Tuesday and pronounced fit to fight, conceded that Jenkins was booked on short notice. But he said the fighter claimed he already was in training when he first came into Peltz's office seeking an opponent two weeks ago.

"Johnny Barr brought him and another fighter he said was from Puerto Rico in on January 2nd," Peltz said. "I couldn't use the one he said was from Puerto Rico because I didn't know anything about him.

"But I looked up Jenkins on my computer and it showed he had a 3-2 record and his last fight was in May 1985 against Victor Claudio in Atlantic City. That meant that he had to have a CAT scan in 1985 because it's required in New Jersey.

"He told me he had just had a fight in Ypsilanti, Michigan, and lost. But I couldn't find it on the computer. But it's unusual for a fighter to say he has lost a fight if he didn't. So I listed him as 3-3.

"I had him scheduled to go in with Willie "The Little Worm" Monroe in a six-rounder. But Monroe got the flu and couldn't fight. That left me a fight short on the card. So I asked Wesley Mouzon about Underwood and then I called Jenkins and told him I could only give him a four (rounds).

"I knew he was expecting more money. But I told him I could only give him a four and it only paid \$150. But I told him if he won, I'd get him a six-rounder with Monroe for \$300."

"He didn't have but 65 dollars," Bobby Jenkins said. "He put the money in my hand. If he got paid \$150, I don't know who got the rest."

James J. Binns, chairman of the Pennsylvania Athletic Commission, said he has seen this day coming for a long time.

"This just seems to be a part of this quote, unquote sport that everybody around it is going to have to live with," Binns said last night. "I have the films of the fight before me and I will review them.

"But I don't see any rules violations or anything to prompt an investigation. The fighter had a passport (a folder indicating his licensing and which medical examination he has undergone). There is no requirement in Pennsylvania for a CAT scan or an electroencephalogram.

"The fight apparently was evenly contested. There was no reason for the referee to stop it. But this is the most dangerous sport in the civilized world. And there just isn't enough being done to make it safe."