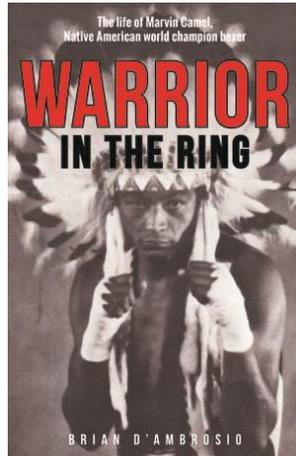


## Marvin Camel: A Study in Determination



Brian D'Ambrosio's biography of Marvin Camel entitled *Warrior in the Ring: The Life of Marvin Camel, Native American World Champion Boxer* is hard to put down. I started reading the book this morning at 7 and except for a few momentary pauses to grab something to eat, I read it cover to cover. It is that good. There are a couple of aspects that make the book worth picking up, central to them the story of Marvin Camel, but this is more than just a story about a boxer. D'Ambrosio includes anecdotal notes that add depth to Camel's story while providing insight into the history of the cruiserweight division and the people who inhabit the sport. I am often asked why I write and photograph a sport that is so brutal and can be so damaging. That is true of the sport. I have seen some hellacious knockouts and men and women battered in the ring. However, the answer to why I am involved is the people. They are some of the most interesting people one could ever hope to meet. Though I have not met Marvin Camel, D'Ambrosio's biography brought him to life.

When I read a biography, I prefer one that is conversational in tone. I want to be welcomed into the subject's life and hear the story unfold. D'Ambrosio writes in just such a manner. His style is fluid, conversational and interesting. Marvin Camel's life is right in front of the reader. Readers feel the tension in Camel's relationship with his father. They sense Camel's desire to be the best at whatever he chooses. They feel disappointment when reading about the difficulties Camel faced in school and the trouble he got into while young. Feeling close to Camel is what makes the book interesting when one starts reading about his boxing career. A reader does not need to be schooled in the world of boxing to know and understand Marvin Camel. D'Ambrosio invites the reader in to Camel's realm, creates a sense of comfort in that realm, and from that point, this becomes less a story about a world champion boxer and more a story about a man driven to succeed. We like Marvin Camel not simply because he was a Native American boxer, or that he was from a small town in Montana, or that he broke ground in the cruiserweight division, or that he won, lost and reclaimed world titles. We like Marvin Camel because we know and understand him, and that is where D'Ambrosio's work shines.

While Camel's story has a wide appeal, the reader who has followed boxing in the Pacific Northwest may find the book even more interesting. The anecdotes that D'Ambrosio sprinkles throughout the book, while enhancing Camel's life and experiences, are full of characters from the Western United States. Camel once fought Joe Hipp in Lacey, Washington. In fact, D'Ambrosio writes of Hipp, a well-regarded Native American boxer in his own right, in the latter portions of the book to highlight the important role

these two men played in the sport and in their native culture. There is also reference to Chauncey Welliver, another Native American boxer and Northwest resident who today is on the forefront of boxing in Eastern Washington. It seemed that every few chapters I found another of the people that we know in the sport, whether it be a referee like Kevin McCarl, judge Tom McDonough, promoter Moe Smith, or matchmaker/trainer Richard Jackson. Finding those people, and the others that D'Ambrosio includes in his book, is a testament to the research and depth he went to in order to provide readers with a thorough portrait of Marvin Camel.

Also of note is the manner in which the book deals with obstacles that Camel faced outside of the ring. D'Ambrosio deftly handles issues of race. Camel's father was African American, his mother Native American, and that led to problems for the Camel children on the reservation. Few boxers get to enjoy the lifestyle and money of Floyd Mayweather, most face times of poverty and having to fight to make money to live. Camel was no different in his career. Though he fought in what may be considered boxing's Golden Era, as a cruiserweight, he was not awarded huge paydays, and readers will feel his pain and torment when a promoter skates off without paying Camel and keeping the \$20,000 purse. While Camel fought overseas and in the limelight in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, it is his affinity for his native Montana that strikes close to his heart. He was a man who worked hard to make the people of Montana proud, and many were. However, gaining the recognition he deserved during the time he was fighting on top of the division eluded him.

Marvin Camel fought at a time when title fights were scheduled for fifteen rounds. A number of times he went the distance, and a number of times he won. D'Ambrosio's book also goes the distance, giving the reader a comprehensive look at a Native American world champion who proved that discipline and a solid work ethic lead to success.

*Warrior in the Ring* is published by Riverbend Press. Images courtesy of Brian D'Ambrosio

