

# Lord of the Ring



Lennox (right) socked it to Hasim and won back his title.

## Boxing champ Lennox Lewis knows he has to prove himself in every fight

**L**ennox Lewis was confident he would defend his world heavyweight boxing crown against little-known challenger Hasim Rahman last April.

Lennox had lost only one fight in 12 years as a pro. Two weeks before the Rahman fight, he switched his focus from training to playing a small role in the movie *Ocean's 11*.

Big mistake. Hasim sent the champ sprawling to the canvas in Round 5 with a thunderous knockout punch.

Fans criticized Lennox for not taking the fight seriously. Says Lennox: "He hit me with a lucky punch. If I had been prepared mentally, he would never have caught me like that."

When Lennox climbed through the ring ropes for his rematch against Hasim last November 24, he was totally prepared. He won back his heavyweight crown by knocking out Hasim in Round 4. "I took the second fight much more seriously," he says. "Mentally I was ready. I was bent on destruction."

Lennox has always been a competitive athlete. He was born in Britain but grew up in Canada, where he was a football and basketball star in school. He started

boxing when he was 12. He got popped in the face so hard in his first match that his eyes watered, but he loved the sport right away. "It was ego against ego," he says. "The one-on-one aspect is what appealed to me."

At 6' 5" and 250 pounds, Lennox is an intimidating figure in the ring. But he is a thinking boxer, not a brawler. He studies his opponent's style with the concentration of a chess player calculating his next move. In fact, the champ *is* a chess player. "Chess helps me with boxing because it keeps my mind focused," he says. "There is always a strategy involved, and every time you play, the game ends differently."

Lennox will most likely defend his heavyweight title in a bout this spring. As of February 11, his next fight was supposed to be against boxing's most unpredictable and explosive fighter: Mike Tyson. Lennox is confident he'll win. But whomever he fights next, Lennox won't take the fight lightly. That's a mistake he made once and won't make again. "I'm not taking any chances," he says.

— by Luis Llosa

As a kid, wrestler Rulon Gardner was teased for being overweight. Now he's an Olympic champion.

**R**ulon Gardner grew up on a dairy farm in Afton, Wyoming. Doing chores such as hauling bales of hay made him strong, but he was teased about being overweight. Kids called him "Fatso" and "Blimp."

Rulon [RU-lon] used the teasing to help motivate him. He was a high school star as a wrestler, defensive tackle in football, and shot-put and discus thrower in track and field. He was the U.S. national Greco-Roman heavyweight champion in 1995, 1997, and 2000.

On September 27, the 6' 2", 286-pound Rulon scored a huge Olympic upset. He toppled 6' 4", 290-pound Alexander Karelin of Russia, 1-0, to win the gold medal in the Greco-Roman super-heavyweight class. Alexander, a three-time Olympic gold medalist, hadn't lost since 1986.

"Just think of the best dream you've ever had," Rulon says of his big victory. "It's a hundred times better than that."

Rulon plans to defend his gold medal at the 2004 Summer Olympics.

— by Sachin Shenolikar

PHOTOGRAPH BY JOE McNALLY

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1. In 12 years, how many fights did Lennox lose?
2. What appeals to Lennox about boxing?
3. What age did Lennox start boxing?
4. What other game helps keep Lennox's mind focused?
5. At 6'5", 250lbs Lennox is small for a boxer. True or False
6. What is Rulon's hometown?
7. What sport did Rulon play in High school?
8. What event did Rulon win a gold medal in?
9. Who did Rulon beat?
10. Rulon gained his strength by working on the farm. True or False