First 3 Rounds

We had a four-hour drive ahead of us. My iPod was fully charged and loaded with songs. My uncle kept asking us if we had everything we needed. He’s a very respectable man; he’s always telling us of the importance of responsibility. There was no way I would forget anything. This was my first official fight, and I was focused. We had been training for several months and had had numerous spars, but now it was real. Whether you win or lose, it means something.

My cousin Lamar is a true comedian. No matter how focused you are, he’ll find a way to make you laugh. He was the best in our gym though, and he was my main sparring partner. I knew I was pretty good because I was the only person in the gym that could keep up with him. He had a fight that night also. He told me it was important to be as relaxed as possible during a fight. He warned me that everything goes much more quickly in real fights than in spars.

After last-minute checks we headed for a very light breakfast and hit the road. We were headed for New Philadelphia, Ohio. It was my coach, Lonnie, my cousin Lamar, my teammate/friend Terrell, and me in the car. I thought we would be very quiet the whole way, but actually we laughed and talked the entire time.

When we arrived in New Philly, we headed over to the hotel where the show was being held. We had to weigh-in. For some odd reason the guy that I was supposed to be fighting weighed in at 128 lbs. We were supposed to be fighting at 120 lbs. He was nine pounds heavier than I; my weight was 119 lbs. I had cut six lbs to make weight. They asked my coach what he wanted to do, and he said let us fight. After weigh-ins we went to McDonald’s and ate well. I was trying to add a couple pounds, personally.

After that we went back to the hotel; Lamar started preparing for his fight. It was good that I got to watch him fight his match before I had to fight mine. It just gave me an idea of what it felt like to be ringside at a real fight. I watched attentively the movements of his head and the swiftness of his feet. There was no way he could lose that fight, he was simply too good. He parried just about every punch the other guy threw. After Lamar won,
he looked at me and said, “Your turn.” There were still about four fights ahead of me, but I knew what he meant.

I started to get ready; I could feel the adrenaline rushing. I was not scared at all, just focused. We did warm-ups, and coach did hand drills with me. There was no smiling, no joking; I wasn’t even thinking. I was just reacting; it seemed as if everything I had learned had been stored and retained in my brain. When I wanted to use it, it was just there.

Finally, it was my turn to fight. We touched gloves and the bell rang. Immediately the guy rushed me because he had a size advantage. He just threw punches, not necessarily at a target; he just prayed that they’d land. He got me against the ropes. He was not hitting me but he was hitting my gloves. They gave me the 8 count and the bell rang “ding- ding,” ending the round. We returned to our corners.

Lamar said, “Coach, let me talk to Ryan.” He said, “He’s not nearly as good as you, little bro. You see he’s just throwing wild punches. Counter him.” I nodded, and the bell rang “ding- ding.” We touched gloves again, and immediately he threw a flurry of wild punches. I side stepped him and caught him with a hard left hook. Just like that, the momentum shifted. This made him angry, and he started chasing me. We were playing my game now. He didn’t know what to do; I was too fast for him. He threw a wild hook, which I ducked and countered with a straight right of my own. It connected, and his nose started bleeding. “Ding- ding,” The bell sounded the end of the round.

I went to my corner dreaming of a drink of water. Lamar squirted some water into my mouth. They told me that I looked good out there and that I didn’t need to get sluggish. Coach told me to keep moving and baiting my opponent to throw wild punches. It felt as if I had only been resting about 3 seconds before the bell sounded the beginning of the third round, “ding- ding.”

We went out and touched gloves; I was pretty confident I would win the round. Once again he started the round with his wild style, and I played with him. He’d come forward, and I’d fake a right-handed punch and throw a left hook followed by a hard right. I must’ve done this six times before his coach yelled “How many times are you going to fall for that?” It was brutal; it really was. I could throw five punches in a second, and two in a half of a second; it just wasn’t fair.

The bell sounded the end of the round and the end of the fight. It was obvious that I was ahead on the score cards; I knew I had won. When they called us two fighters to come up to the center of the ring, they didn’t lift my hand, and everyone in the hotel screamed loud “boo’s.” My coach kept asking how in the world they came up with their decision. New Philadelphia was my opponent’s home town. It was obvious that was a major factor in my loss. The only judge that wasn’t from there had me winning by a landslide. The two judges from there had me losing by a fraction.
I had never been so hurt in my life. I had people coming up to me saying things like, “You should’ve won that fight, son; keep your head up.” Only thing I thought about was that I traveled four hours to lose a fight that I should’ve won. It’s bad when you cheat a kid. It takes the fun out of sports for kids when they know they’ve been cheated; it kills their spirits.