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IS IT LOVE AT ALL COSTS?; HAGLER'S WIFE MUST HAVE GOOD REASON FOR REQUEST

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BOXING / By STEVE MARANTZ

Men, for a moment be honest with yourselves. Painfully honest.

Would you give up a chance to make between \$10 million and \$15 million because your wife asked you to?

Would you give up the chance to bank a fortune as a payoff for two months of hard physical labor because your wife wanted you home nights? This is no petty million-dollar payday you're being asked to give up. This is a sum of money that could make your children and their children and generations of your descendants secure and comfortable.

Would you give that up for your wife? Even if you loved her very much? Even if it meant you might lose her love?

Women, be honest, painfully honest.

Would you ask your husband to give up a \$10 million to \$15 million payday? Even if you have all the money you need, and more than you ever dreamed of having, could you ask him to say no? Does his love require proof that expensive? And if it does, will he ever feel cheated?

The average married couple will never go through what Marvelous Marvin Hagler and Bertha Hagler are going through today, and maybe it's a good thing. Although nobody can be sure what is transpiring behind their closed doors, from what little we've seen, it can't be much fun.

We do know this: Bertha Hagler believes her husband has lost the inner drive that made him a great fighter. She said he no longer enjoys running in the morning or going to the gym.

This scene occurs in every "Rocky" movie. Adrian tells Rocky she doesn't believe he can beat Apollo Creed or Clubber Lang or Drago. Her doubt grows within him until it becomes self-fulfilling. In the end, Adrian gives her blind faith to Rocky, and it sustains him to victory.

The "Rocky" movies are hopelessly hokey. Adrian doesn't know a hook from a jab, but Bertha Hagler can analyze a five-punch combination and tell you which punch landed where and why it was thrown. Bertha Hagler once said she appreciates boxing "as an art." Most women do not like boxing at all.

Which makes us wonder what Bertha Hagler is thinking. After years of being a boxer's wife, can it be too difficult to be one for a few months more, if it means gaining a fortune? And if it is too difficult, why? Can it be that the wife of the middleweight champion senses something that the rest of us have not?

Hagler took more punches in his last two fights than he probably had in the previous six years. Ray Leonard's inactivity makes him an unknown quantity, but he is generally considered a "safe" opponent for Hagler. Safe in the sense that he is a smaller man not known for a physical style or heavy punching.

Would Bertha Hagler be worried if that were truly the case? There is a mysterious force in boxing that flows from the minds and hearts of fighters. Bertha Hagler sat in on a dinner with Juanita Leonard and the two husbands in January. Besides pleasant conversation, what else was exchanged that night? A couple of months later, Leonard issued his challenge.

What Bertha Hagler may be thinking is this: Her husband was the second man to knock out Thomas Hearns; Leonard was the first. Her husband needed a 15th round to defeat Roberto Duran; Leonard drove him from the ring in humiliation. Her husband does not enjoy the gym anymore; Leonard has been training for months for no other reason than sheer enjoyment.

One of the interesting bouts of the summer takes place Saturday when Evander Holyfield challenges Dwight Braxton Qawi for the 195-pound title, known as both the cruiserweight and junior heavyweight division.

Holyfield is the first of the 1984 US Olympians to be matched in a pro title bout -- before more celebrated teammates Mark Breland, Tyrell Biggs and Pernell Whitaker. There were nine gold medal winners on that US squad, and Holyfield was not among them.

Almost everyone remembers Holyfield for being disqualified in a semifinal bout after allegedly hitting a New Zealander after the bell. Although he ended up with a bronze medal, his poise and polish boded well for a pro career. Holyfield did not disappoint; his 11-0 (8 KOs) record has brought him quickly to the day of reckoning.

"I'm honored to be the first one to get the chance," Holyfield said last week. "A lot of people expected a lot of things from me because of that disqualification. My main thing is to capitalize."

Holyfield was one of the Olympians -- along with Breland, Biggs, Whitaker and Meldrick Taylor -- signed by the Duva family's Main Event Productions and ABC. Publicist Kathy Duva said that Holyfield was pushed into a title bout ahead of the others because he reached boxing maturity first.

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