

A fight of passage

Hagler and Hearns at threshold, and there's room for only one

By Steve Marantz
Globe Staff

LAS VEGAS — You're Marvelous Marvin Hagler and you're at the threshold of boxing greatness. A cold-eyed sentry bars your way and you're staring up the long barrels of his loaded guns. His left hand is a small-caliber automatic that can pick you apart, piece by piece. His right hand is the .357 Magnum that can blow you into oblivion. Both hands move in blurs, trailing pinwheels of light. You're Marvelous Marvin Hagler and you're walking into a deadly line of fire because that's the direction of greatness.

You're Thomas Hearns and you're also on the threshold of greatness. The mask of evil looms before you, snarling with hot breath. It grows before your eyes, like some nightmarish apparition, ever more malevolent, sucking away the air you breathe. You're Thomas Hearns and greatness has become a demon at your throat.

High noon in boxing occurs at 10:55 p.m. (BST) tonight.

Marvelous Marvin Hagler, the middleweight champion, and Thomas Hearns, the challenger, will engage in one of the most lucrative and anticipated bouts in boxing history.

The bout, scheduled for 12 rounds in a 15,600-seat outdoor stadium behind the Caesars Palace hotel, matches boxing's two best fighters, pound for pound. Hagler is defending his undisputed 160-pound title for the 11th time. Hearns, who holds one of the 154-pound titles, is in his first fight for the heavier title.

The fighters are guaranteed over \$5 million each and could realize much more if closed-circuit television audiences across the country reach the 1.8-million level — including 130,000 in New England — predicted by promoter Bob Arum. The largest closed-circuit audience to date was 1.6 million for the first Ali-Frazier bout in 1971.

The bout will be shown in "most Free World countries," Arum said.



It's a time of reflection for Marvelous Marvin Hagler. He has trained during the week at Johnny Tocco's gym and hopes he's prepared.

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO BY JIM WILSON

Wagering at Nevada's legal sports books will set a one-fight record of \$10 million, officials predicted, topping the \$8.9 million bet on the Hearns-Leonard bout in 1981. Hagler was a slight favorite yesterday, but the odds are expected to be even at fight time.

The match is considered "a fight fan's fight" because its appeal is based on an intriguing contrast of skills rather than personality or hype, although there has been no lack of the latter.

Boxing experts envision several scenarios:

- The quick knockout. Hearns flatly predicted a third-round knockout in the weeks leading up to the fight, only qualifying himself in recent days, saying, "You can't force it." Hearns' history is to come out bombing — he stopped both Pipino Cuevas and Roberto Duran in Round 2. Hagler, on the other hand, comes out slowly. He has never seen speed such as Hearns will show him, and it will take Hagler some time to gauge it. A Hearns right hand might send

weaving inside of Hearns' long arms and to pummeling Hearns' bony rib cage. Hearns, who showed his body to be vulnerable in his 14-round TKO loss to Leonard, will drop his hands to protect himself. Hagler might finish him with a flurry started by a right hook to Hearns' chin.

- A decision. Hearns, falling an early knockout, will get up on his toes and propel his long legs into action. He will circle and jab, circle and jab, staying off the ropes, while Hagler chases. Hearns' legs might keep him out of danger as his jab piles up enough points to win.

- Of the three most likely scenarios, then, Hearns wins two. But Hagler will win, for several reasons.

Hagler has the best chin in boxing. He has never legitimately been knocked down — forget the Juan Roldan slip. Hearns, meanwhile, has never knocked down a full-sized middleweight. Hearns has feasted on smaller opponents, such as Duran and Cuevas.

Once a Hearns knockout is eliminated, it remains for Hagler to pursue and Hearns to evade. There is a reasonable chance Hearns can dance for 12 rounds, particularly because Hagler tends to be cautious and conservative. Hagler needs to apply the pressure.

Such pressure requires a Duran-like ferocity, and Hagler has it. Hearns' "midget" remark Friday sent Hagler into a smoldering funk.

"I'm tired of this shuckin' and jivin' — let's get it on," snarled Hagler.

Hearns, meanwhile, is in his usual vacant mode.

For Hagler, who values respect and tradition and is nearing the end of his career, this is the bout he will be remembered by.

"The money isn't important in this one," Hagler has said. "I feel that after I beat Thomas Hearns I will be considered one of the great middleweight champions." The heat is on. Hagler, KO 8.

Tale of the tape

	Hagler	Hearns
Age	31	26
Weight	160	160
Height	5-9½	6-1½
Reach	75	78
Chest (normal)	40	39
Chest (expanded)	42	41
Biceps	15	15
Forearm	12	12
Waist	30	30
Thigh	22	20
Calf	15	13
Neck	16	15½
Wrist	7	8
Fist	12	11¾
Ankle	10	11½

NOTE: 160 pounds is the class limit. Official weights will be announced tomorrow morning.

him crashing down before he figures it out.

- A late knockout. Hagler, should he get past the early rounds, will set to bobbing and

Clipped By:



marantzsteve696
Fri, Mar 1, 2019