

Mean, fightin' words from Hagler, Hearns

GLOBE STAFF PHOTO BY JIM WILSON

By Steve Marantz
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LAS VEGAS — Using Huey Long's theory that public speaking need not be eloquent to be effective, Thomas Hearns called Marvelous Marvin Hagler a "midget" and Hagler called Hearns a "freak" in angry remarks made before reporters and one another yesterday.

The remarks, at a morning press conference at Caesars Palace Hotel, came during the first face-to-face meeting of the boxers since they both attended a press session in New York in early February. Their next encounter will be the weigh-in Monday morning, previous to their middleweight title bout that night.

Most observers agreed that while Hearns got in the first riposte, bringing fire to Hagler's eyes, the champion's return verbiage withered the challenger. Hagler's superior media showing has resulted in the betting odds swinging back slightly to his favor yesterday, according to a local sports book.

The spark that lit up what is normally a perfunctory press function before a major fight was struck by Hagler's co-manager, Pat Petronelli, who said from the dais, "Tommy Hearns is a great junior middleweight champion but now he's going into the man's backyard where the sign says 'no trespassing.'"

Moments later, Hearns took the microphone and said, "I've been a man for seven or eight years. I've been fighting middleweights and light heavyweights and taking good care of them. And now I'm fighting a midget."

Hagler, stung to the quick, took the microphone after Hearns sat down, thanked the hotel for its role in promoting the bout, and said, "He's got a nerve calling somebody a midget."

Looking directly at Hearns, a few feet away, Hagler said, "You're just a freak fella."

Hagler referred to Hearns' unusual height of 6-feet-1½ for the middleweight division. Hagler is listed at 5-9½. In publicity photos Hearns appears to tower over Hagler by six inches. Hearns' handlers say Hagler wore shoes with stacked heels during their 10-day promotional tour two months ago so as not to appear short.

Hearns, who is not known for cleverness, shot back, "It takes a freak to know a freak."

Hagler replied, "I'm going to beat the bleep out of you."

Hagler went on, saying "When I step into a ring, I become a giant."

"I'm tired of this shuckin' and jivin'. These — he brandished his two fists — "will get it on. I'm not a politician, I'm a fighter, and it's time to fight."

Questioned by reporters about the "midget" comment, Hearns said, "Looking at Marvin and me, you see a difference in height. I use my height and reach to my advantage and that will cause a problem."

Asked about his "freak" comment, Hagler said, "How can anyone be 6-1 and a welterweight? He should be playing basketball."

Hagler was also asked about Hearns' prediction of a third-round knockout. "That's only because Thomas can't count past three," he said.

After questions, Hagler and Hearns were posed for pictures, and stood face-to-face for at least a

minute, staring sullenly.

Meanwhile, Hagler became a slight favorite once again in back-and-forth betting that may set a Nevada record for total wagered on one fight.

At the Castaways Sports Book, it took a bet of \$1.25 on Hagler to win \$1, while a bet of \$1.15 on Hearns would win \$1. A few days ago, Hearns was favored, \$1.30 to \$1.10.

"That's a major turnaround for a fight like this," said Sonny Reizner of the Castaways. "Hagler money started coming in yesterday (Thursday)."

Hagler money is being wagered by small bettors, Reizner said.

"Hagler is making most of the press comment and showing a lot of confidence," said Reizner. "That influences the small bettors."

Nevada's legal sports books are anticipating \$10 million in wages on the fight, topping the \$8-9 million wagered on Leonard-Hearns, and the \$7 million wagered on Cooney-Holmes.

"In general, there is more sports betting than ever before," said Reizner, a Framingham native. "This fight has gotten a lot of publicity and you know you'll see a good fight."

A non-boxing note of interest: The Red Sox' sweep of the Yankees has dropped the odds on them winning the World Series from 12-1 to 5-1.

The third scoring judge will be Dickey Cole of Texas, Arum said. Cole was named by the Nevada Athletic Commission to replace Rudy Ortega, whom the Petronellis objected to. "Cole is very fair," said Arum.

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