

LENNOX LEWIS

The former world heavyweight champ shapes up to your questions on his toughest fights, "Chicken Bowe" and playing chess

➔ OFTEN BILLED AS THE "LAST GREAT HEAVYWEIGHT", Lennox Lewis twice reigned as undisputed champion of that division, winning the title on three separate occasions and defeating everyone he fought, including an emphatic victory against Mike Tyson. Lewis retired as champion in 2004, with a healthy bank balance and his marbles still very much in place. Now, he takes the body blows from *Alpha* readers.

How do you fill your time as a rich, retired athlete? *K Temple, via email*
Commentating, reading scripts, looking after my family. There's a couple of different business ventures I'm involved in; I'm always busy.

A lot of boxers can't cope with retirement. How have you?
S Haddon, via email

I've accomplished my goals. That's one of the reasons why I've coped. I accomplished them, retired – now I set new goals for myself.

You were obviously much better than Oliver McCall. How did you let him get close enough to do damage (in Lewis's 1994 WBC title loss)?
L Watson, Sydney

It was a situation where you both threw a punch at the same moment. He was able to get through because he's got much shorter arms and [his punch] was a lot quicker – and I kind of telegraphed mine.

For the second McCall fight, was there any indication he would have a nervous breakdown? (The referee called off the '97 bout after McCall started crying and refused to fight.)

B Hathaway, via email
Yes, Don King kept him away from all the journalists, kept him hidden. And I was wondering why – and then we saw why. We saw a man with mental problems get into the ring. Because [King's] the promoter of the fight, he caused it. Don King's got a lot of money invested in the titles. But this guy's got drug problems and mental problems, and yet King needs him to step in the ring. I was



prepared for everything, but I wasn't prepared for a man breaking down. At first I thought it was a game, but then it did seem like he was going through some serious emotional problems. He didn't say anything; he was just crying.

Why is America fading so badly in heavyweight boxing, and why are the Europeans so good?

G Keir, Adelaide
[It's a] great amateur system they grew up with (in Russia). A lot of the Americans turn professional pretty quickly – they're missing out on a lot of experience. I'm the last great champion, a lot of people always say that, and a lot of the American public have now lost interest. There's K1 (kickboxing combat), there's Ultimate Fighting (mixed martial arts) now – people are more tuned in to these kind of things – European boxers they don't know, there's no Holyfield, no Tyson for them to connect to. These [Russian heavyweights] haven't grown up on American TV and the Americans can't relate to them.

Is it true you nearly became a professional basketballer?

Steve, via email
Not professional, but college basketball. I had to go to college before I could turn professional. That was actually my first love.

You've done a bit of movie acting. How serious are you about that?

Ian, via email
Pretty serious. Life after boxing

– I've got to evolve. I'm not going to be a boxer all my life.

How often do you play chess?

A Rossi, via email
As often as possible. The problem is there aren't too many people who play chess.

With the benefit of time, what's your opinion of Riddick Bowe now?

N Whitney, via email
He's a big turkey. First, because he didn't fight me after the (1988) Olympics (in which Lewis defeated Bowe in the gold medal bout) because he said he wanted to

redeem his loss. So I spread this "Chicken Bowe" thing – still didn't fight me. Now I've retired and he's out there calling my name like he wants to fight me. So now he's a big turkey. He's a man that doesn't get no respect from me.

You seemed a lot less aggressive and less prone to trash talk than many boxers. Why?

I Niland, via email
Because I'm a pugilist specialist. I believe in the sweet science.

You spend a lot of time and money on the welfare of underprivileged children. Why? *A Rossi, via email*
You've got to give back. Because

you're able to make so much money, it's important to help people less fortunate than you.

Who was your toughest opponent and why? *T Marlow, Perth*

They were all tough. If it wasn't physical, there was a mental strain because you have to prepare for each one of them. I've been tested in different ways. In New York, they put me in a 15-foot ring, and they're usually 18-20 feet. The (Zeljko) Mavrovic fight was a tough one (in 1998; Lewis won on points). He was virtually unknown, and he really trained for me – he really wanted to beat me. The (Vitali) Klitschko fight I fought differently to any other fight. It was the first time I've ever boxed a guy that big – it took a little time to get used to. (This was Lewis's last fight, in 2003; he won by TKO at the end of the sixth.)

Do you think sports stars should act as role models? *A Rossi, via email*

To a certain degree, yes. Because they're in the public eye and there's a lot of kids that look up to them. You want to feel you've steered them in the right direction.

What was the best performance of your career? *J Dunn, via email*

My most satisfying [fights] were beating Razor Ruddock, Frank Bruno and Hasim Rahman.

Can you understand why Evander Holyfield is going on so long?

A Melicic, via email
He needs the money; he's got nine kids.

“They persecuted Ali. I had to go through that.”

Do you think the American public gave you all the respect that you deserved? *A Ollberg, via email*

No. The way I look at it, many great men were persecuted. They did the same to Muhammad Ali. They hated him at first and then they loved him. I realised that I had to go through that. Americans are really patriotic, too.

Will anything tempt you back in the ring? *M Harrison, via email*

Yes: \$100 million.

Always wanted to get the truth from Allan Border or Alan Jones? Send your questions and suggestions to: alpha.legends@newsmagazines.com.au