

PERNELL ‘SWEET PEA’ WHITAKER, 1964-2019

By all accounts, a unanimous winner

By MANOUK AKOPYAN

Pernell Whitaker, heralded as one of the greatest boxers to ever lace up a pair of gloves, died Sunday night after he was hit by a pickup truck while walking across a thoroughfare in Virginia.

Whitaker, 55, died from his injuries on the scene. Virginia Beach Police said they were investigating the circumstances of his death. The driver of the vehicle remained at the scene after the crash.

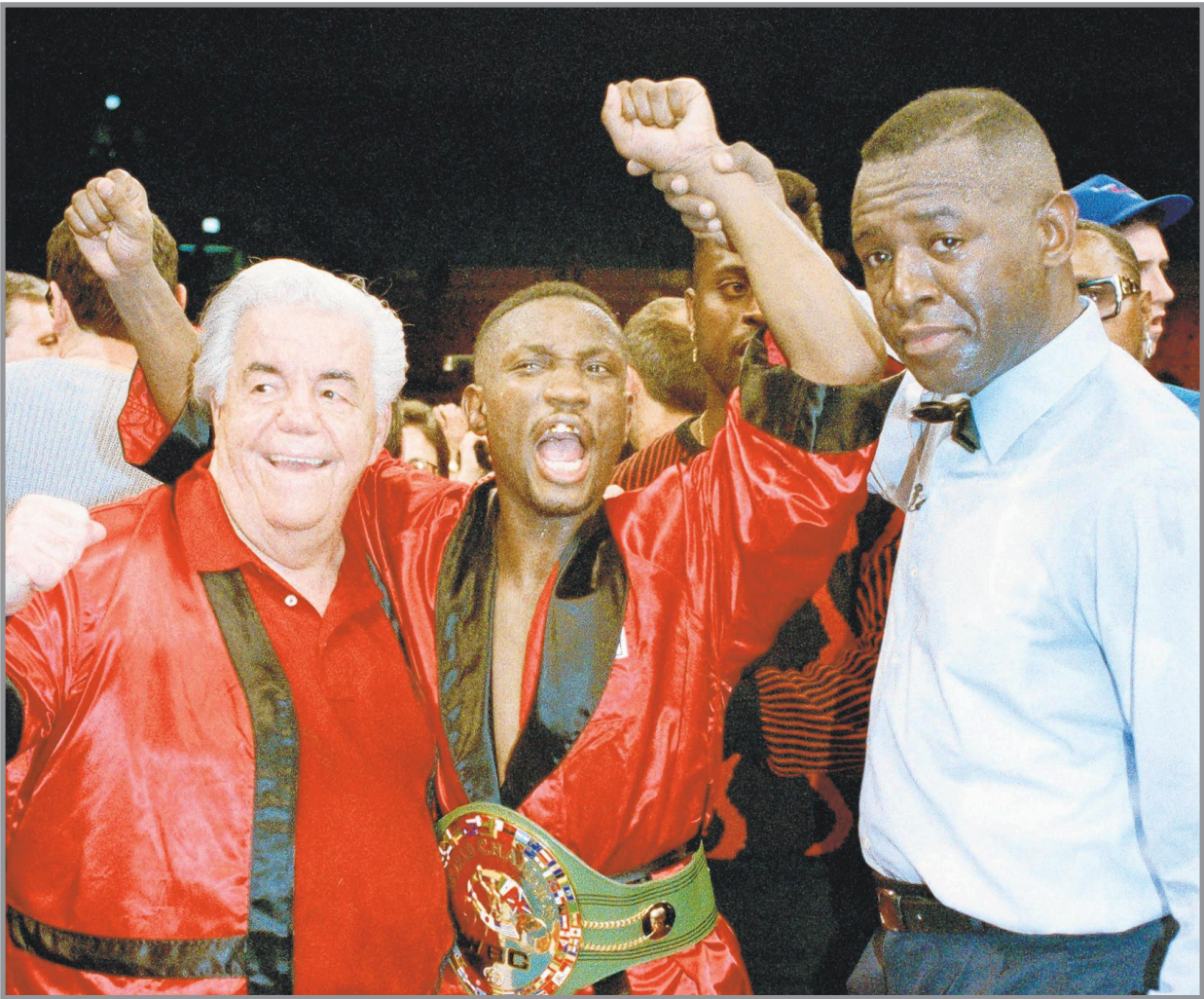
Nicknamed “Sweet Pea,” Whitaker was a Hall of Fame fighter, a 1984 Olympic gold medalist and a perennial pound-for-pound king during his 17-year career. The Norfolk-born southpaw was a four-division champion who finished with 40 wins —17 via knockout — four losses and one draw.

His lone draw against Julio Cesar Chavez in 1993 was arguably Whitaker’s finest hour as a professional; but the final scorecards from the mega-fight told a different story.

By all accounts, Whitaker handily beat Chavez in front of more than 60,000 fans at the Alamodome in San Antonio. Chavez was undefeated in 87 fights, and Whitaker out-landed him 311 to 220 and threw 153 more punches. It’s considered one of the most controversial decisions in boxing history, and the dubious scores elicited a Sports Illustrated cover with “Robbed!” written on it as Whitaker connected with a right hand on Chavez’s chin.

“I knew this might happen,” Whitaker said after the fight. “But still it was like a bad dream. Last night it was like someone put a knife in me and twisted it.”

A Sports Illustrated cover in 1994 billed him as “The Best,” and the label was an apt compliment for Whitaker, a pure pugilist in the ring who morphed his body with “Matrix”-like motions and danced around punches with panache. His masterful “hit but don’t get hit back” style is a blueprint today for



RON FREHM Associated Press

THE ‘SWEET’ TASTE OF VICTORY

Pernell Whitaker celebrates with trainer Lou Duva, left, after referee Larry Hazard raised his hand to declare him the winner over James “Buddy” McGirt in 1993, earning him his third world championship.

defensive tacticians.

Trained by the duo of Lou Duva and George Benton, Whitaker fought out of a crouch and slipped around flustered opponents to much fanfare en route to becoming a champion in the lightweight, super lightweight, welterweight and super welterweight divisions. He turned pro at Madison Square Garden on national TV in 1984 and first became a world champion by outpointing Greg Haugen in 1989, a year in which he was declared “Fighter of the Year” by Ring Magazine and the Boxing Writers Assn. of America.

Whitaker dealt with cocaine addiction and alcohol

problems throughout his career and into retirement. He served time in prison after violating his probation on a conviction for cocaine possession in 2003.

According to the Virginia Sports Hall of Fame, where he is also an inductee, Whitaker won 201 of 214 amateur fights before turning pro after the 1984 Summer Games in Los Angeles. Whitaker was part of one of the best U.S. boxing teams in Olympic history, highlighting a group of 11 medalists that also featured Evander Holyfield and Meldrick Taylor. Whitaker also won a gold medal at the 1983 Pan American Games and a silver medal at the 1982 world

championships.

“I am saddened to learn of my good friend and Olympic teammate Pernell Whitaker’s untimely passing,” Holyfield tweeted Monday. “We share so many great memories. He was small in stature but yet so big in heart and skills inside the ring, there will never be another like him. He will truly be missed.”

Whitaker beat Hall of Famers Azumah Nelson and James “Buddy” McGirt (twice), as well as Roger Mayweather. He avenged his first loss, which came in 1988 against Jose Luis Ramirez, a fighter with 102 career wins, by beating him in 1989.

“The boxing world lost a

real great fighter and great man,” McGirt told The Times. “It was an honor to be in the ring with him twice. In the second fight, he hit me so much I thought I was surrounded. May God bless his soul and may he rest in eternal peace.”

Whitaker’s career was seemingly embroiled in controversial defeats. He also lost a disputed decision to Oscar De La Hoya in 1997, a fight many in boxing said that Whitaker won. Statistics showed that Whitaker out-punched De La Hoya 232 to 191.

“Of course [I won], but that really doesn’t matter,” Whitaker said after the fight. “As long as the world saw it,

then the people can say who won the fight. I should have gotten 10 out of 12 rounds. It was a shutout. For 12 rounds, he took punishment, he took a beating. He can have the title but we know who the best fighter is.”

De La Hoya offered his condolences Monday after learning of Whitaker’s death.

“In terms of his defense and ring generalship, Pernell Whitaker was the best fighter that I ever fought. It was an honor to share the ring with him,” De La Hoya said. “I’m deeply saddened by the loss of this great champion, who gave a tremendous amount of joy to those who watched him.”

The penultimate bout of Whitaker’s career was a one-sided decision loss to Felix Trinidad in 1999, and a proverbial passing of the torch to the next generation. In his final fight in 2001, Whitaker broke a collarbone during a fourth-round stoppage loss to the unheralded Carlos Bojorquez and retired.

During retirement, Whitaker stayed involved in the sport as a trainer in the Virginia Beach area and made appearances at promotional events. He was scheduled to be in Las Vegas this Saturday for the Manny Pacquiao-Keith Thurman fight and partake in ceremonial activities around town.

“He was a flawless fighter,” Mike Tyson wrote on Twitter.

“One of the best fighters to ever do it,” Floyd Mayweather Jr. said in an Instagram post featuring a picture he took with Whitaker just two days ago.

“Pernell Whitaker was beautiful — both as a fighter and as a human being ... giving fans many unforgettable moments,” HBO, which broadcast 19 of Whitaker’s fights, announced in a statement. “He was an artist in the ring.”

Akopyan has been a member of the Boxing Writers Assn. of America since 2011 and has written for USA Today and the Guardian.

PRO CALENDAR

	TUE. 16	WED. 17	THU. 18	FRI. 19	SAT. 20
DODGERS	at Phila. 4 SNLA	at Phila. 4 SNLA	at Phila. 9:30 a.m. YouTube	MIAMI 7 SNLA	MIAMI 6 SNLA
ANGELS	HOUSTON 7 FSW	HOUSTON 7 FSW	HOUSTON 6 FSW	at Seattle 7 FSW	at Seattle 6 FSW
GALAXY				LAFC 7 ESPN	
LAFC				at GALAXY 7 ESPN	
SPARKS			DALLAS 12:30 SpecSN		at New York Noon SpecSN, NBA TV

Shade denotes home game

Ogwumike voted to All-Star team

By MIA BERRY

Sparks forward Nneka Ogumike was selected to play in her sixth WNBA All-Star game, the league announced Monday. Ogumike was voted as a reserve for the July 27 game in Las Vegas.

She will join teammate Chelsea Gray, who was named a WNBA All-Star starter July 11. Ogumike and Gray have been the most consistent players for the Sparks this season, as the team has dealt with injuries to Candace Parker, Alana Beard, Maria Vadeeva and Alexis Jones.

A former league MVP, Ogumike is averaging 15.5 points and 9.5 rebounds per

game while shooting 45.8% from the field. She is third in the league in rebounding, fifth in steals (1.9) and 10th in scoring.

For the week ending July 14, Ogumike was named WNBA player of the week, averaging 18 points, 10.3 rebounds and 3.67 steals, including 22 points against the Indiana Fever and 17 points in an overtime victory over the Atlanta Dream.

Ogumike is joined by front-court reserves DeWanna Bonner, Tina Charles, Candice Dupree, Sylvia Fowles and Alyssa Thomas.

Washington Mystics forward Elena Delle Donne and Las Vegas Aces forward A’ja Wilson will serve as team captains.



MARCIO JOSE SANCHEZ Associated Press

SPARKS forward Nneka Ogumike, left, was selected as a reserve to her sixth WNBA All-Star team.

MORNING BRIEFING

NJ Devil checks himself into the glass

By HOUSTON MITCHELL AND CHUCK SCHILKEN

The New Jersey Devils mascot apparently is OK after running into and shattering a glass window at a child’s birthday party. No one was injured.

Which is good, not only for everyone involved but also the rest of us, who can now feel free to laugh at the hilarious and totally bizarre videos of the incident posted to social media this weekend by the Devils and the birthday boy’s father.

NJ Devil and a bunch of squealing children can be seen playing with a parachute at an indoor play area that has giant window panes serving as the front wall. Everyone seems to be having a great time until the devil suddenly lets go of the colorful toy and inexplicably runs straight into one of the windows.

In a scene that could have come from one of those Southwest Airlines “Wanna get away?” commercials, the

glass shatters upon impact, the squealing stops and the poor devil is left standing there as everyone stares.

“My son’s birthday ended with a bang!” Lawrence Chiu said in a tweet. “We are so ready for this season thanks NJ Devil for coming to the birthday party.”

Sports poll

The Dodgers have the best record in baseball, but some fans are concerned that their bullpen will keep them from winning a World Series title. So this week’s question is, do you think the Dodgers will win the World Series this year? Vote in our poll at poll.fm/10364296 or email me at houston.mitchell@latimes.com. Results will be revealed next week.

Results from last week’s poll: We asked, “Who will win the NBA’s Western Conference next season?” After 6,102 votes, here are the results:

- Lakers, 45.4%
- Clippers, 29.4%
- Golden State, 7.3%

- Houston, 5.8%
- Denver, 4.6%
- Portland, 3.1%
- Utah, 2.7%
- Other, 1.7% (San Antonio, Phoenix and Sacramento received the most votes in “other”).

Your favorite sports moment

What is your favorite L.A. sports moment? Here’s the next one in our occasional series. Email me your favorite sports moment (houston.mitchell@latimes.com) and it might run in a future Morning Briefing.

Our next one comes from Pete Peterson of Camarillo: “The Dodgers moving to L.A. in 1958 was big, then bigger in 1959 when they won the World Series. Kirk Gibson got my vote in 1988 for World Series MVP. How great was it when a rookie point guard replaced Hall of Farmer Kareem Abdul-Jabbar at center for the final game of the 1980 NBA Finals? Magic Johnson took over that game, scoring 42

points.

“My greatest memory, though, must be the 1974 USC-Notre Dame football game. I was in the Navy, stationed in Virginia, when I watched the game on TV. After sportingly spotting Notre Dame a 24-0 advantage shortly before halftime, USC then scored 55 unanswered points in 17 minutes. Anthony Davis scored four TDs, including returning the second-half kickoff for a score. After USC took the lead, I called the local radio DJ to play the USC fight song. He didn’t have a copy, but asked me to continue giving him updates throughout the game. Voting for the Heisman Trophy that year concluded prior to the end of the season. Many writers stated they would have changed their vote had they been allowed to wait until after this game. Archie Griffin may not have become the only two-time Heisman winner. Anthony Davis had 11 TDs against Notre Dame in three games.”

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