After fighting

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(2nd version)

After a few years, my book "Fighter's Encyclopedia" is still selling. As happy as I have been that the book sells, I hope that everyone who purchased or will purchase or download that book will also download this. This E-book is about something that most (if not all) books in this field neglects to talk about.

What happens after fighting?

In this subjective text, I'm covering issues that have concerned me a great deal in my fighting career and about my friends who are still fighting. So, for all of you fighting, managing or coaching, as well as any of you contemplating any of the aforementioned, this is for you.

So, you're a great fighter!

The ideal world for fighters differs to each regarding age, stage of career and family life. Younger fighters care mostly about the big break, beating a big name, making a lot of money per fight, that Ferrari and a swarm of girls. Older fighters may wish they had a steady stream of reasonably paying fights, advertising contracts and a disability pension.

It is not only fighters who want to kick your butt, but also life – yes, fighters need no reminder of that. Promoters, coaches, managers and your sparring partners all want a piece of your earnings and when your earnings drop, they move on to the next "golden boy".

It is said: Be careful what you wish for; you might just get it. That is very true for this life. You may wish for the big break into K1, Pancrase, UFC, Pride or whatever you fancy, but once in, I have yet to see a fighter retire gracefully and make a clean break. Unfortunately, for most, this game is too addictive to let go.

Having spent time in and among the top leagues, I have seen it all and heard it all. More so in Japan than most other places I've been. Most of the big organizations, such as K1 and Pride use the same hotels year round and take up a lot of rooms at any time for fighters, managers and coaches. The fans hang around and these hotel lounges is a non-stop photo opportunity for all of them. They hang around, hoping to chat with their idols.

Not all fighters take it the same way, some are easily irritated, but to most, these fans also provide the drug. Wealthy fans provide gifts (anything from a paid dinner to a new Mercedes-Benz) and less wealthy fans just ask for your autographs and picture. Girls hang around the lounges or go up to the fighters rooms – invited and uninvited. This quickly becomes an addictive drug - as much as any other.

Fighters who earn less and fight for smaller organisations may have to take up several jobs to pay the rent while they fight. They work days or nights and train hard and strange hours to be in top shape for the next fight. Their live revolve around fighting – hoping for that next big break.

What happens if you lose all this?

What happens if you walk across the street and a car runs you over, leaving you with broken legs, or worse, a permanent disability? What if you break your leg two weeks before your "big break"? What if you start to lose more fights and promoters are not interested in you anymore? What if you wake up one morning, forty years old, wishing you'd chosen something else in your life as a career, but now with a battered brain and little education and career experience, nobody wants to hire you except as a bouncer? What happens after fighting?

What happens after fighting need not be a shock or a let-down. Just prepare for it as you prepare for each fight – from planning to training to execution – you already have the tools for it. As a fighter you are already prepared to work hard to achieve your goals. This may be the singularly biggest asset in your personal arsenal and this is going to be the key to your future after fighting.

The ideal situation after fighting

No matter how much you know about fighting and the industry, it is not feasible for most retired fighters to move into coaching and managing fighters. You may have a lot to offer fighters and while coaching may be easy and fairly natural, being a manager or promoter takes a whole different skill set. Even so, if you were a very popular fighter, you will probably never earn as much in coaching/managing as when you were trading punches. The ideal situation is for you to be able to retire with minimal damage to body and brain, step into a career where you will earn reasonably with good future prospects. Ideally you have also put some of your hard-earned cash aside as a nest-egg or invested into a sensible investment. By sensible investment I mean well-thought through, well-advised by qualified advisers. Or, at the least, you have invested in some property such as a home for yourself. To be able to do this takes some preparation and the time to start is immediately.

The unfortunate reality

So what have we all seen happen to fighters? There are some tough stories out there: Some roam the streets trying to get "respect" and end up on the wrong side of the law. Others just become hired muscle in some form or another – from bouncer to bodyguard to hit man. A few others try to forget and take to chemicals in some form.

What have you seen around you? How many fighters – great and top-earning fighters – have you seen make a success of their pursuits after they hung up the gloves?

It is sad to say that I have not seen many. I have seen a few who have stayed in the game as trainers, opening bigger and diversified gyms, who earn enough to get by. I wish they earned more and saved up for the day when the old injuries catch up and they can't get out of bed to unlock the gym at 5am anymore.

Broke and beaten. This is where life took so many great fighters.

A few problem areas (We know them all):

- Long term injuries and brain damage

Some injuries are permanent (being severe or too expensive for the fighter to afford the surgery); some are chronic (such as arthritis in your hands); bad back and neck injuries reminding you every cold morning that they are there. I have very good friends who have started to slur. Very few noticed, but if you have not seen your friend for a few years, meeting up with him can be shocking. I wonder when such people will realize that it is too late? What will they ever be able to do to earn an income? Who will hire you?

- Fighting after your prime

The fame is so addictive that I've seen fighters past their prime (losing more than winning) still there, still fighting. This is where the most severe injuries and brain damage come from. You don't want to be a grandpa unable to spell or remember you grandson's name. There comes a time when you have to call it quits. In my personal opinion that time is when you are forty

years old at the latest. Some boxing organizations don't give licenses after the age of 36. They have medical evidence for that, so take heed.

- Lack of support structure

What you need when you quit is a support structure and a stable environment. Who will take care of you after fighting? The answer is simple: Nobody. If you have taken care of your family in a responsible way then you have a strong foundation and something to return to. Unfortunately, I have seen too many fighters neglect family and fatherly responsibilities. I've seen fighters living in the hotels nine out of twelve months, not seeing their kids and wives. Little boys and girls not having a present role model creates problems in the future. What about your marriage? Did long months living separated make you and your spouse strangers to each other? Will a divorce further cut up the income you've managed to accumulate and devastate your life and restrict again access to your children? You don't need this. Take care of what you have.

What can you do?

Proverbs say that Wisdom will take care of you if you reach out to her. Wisdom starts with common sense and planning. I do not profess to know it all and I suggest talking to a few people, such as recruiters (to know what is in demand in terms of skills) and education institutions (both for blue collar and white collar jobs) to see how much it would cost to "re-skill" you or to review how current your skills are.

Talk to a few people in business and hear what they say. Talk to experts. Your sparring partner is not the one to talk to about investment advice (unless he happens to be a full-time investment adviser working for a respected firm); your coach can't help you with jobs or entrepreneurial advice and no, not every fighter can open a night club or another gym or become a bouncer.

Do not talk to the people you usually talk to. Move out of your fighter circle; take the time and effort and talk to a few professionals that are active and successful in their fields. As a

fighter you asked the best coaches for advice, so why would you take job advice from a coach barely able to pay his rent?

Useful advice

- Prepare for injury days

Give your physical injuries time to heal. Keep a few dollars aside for times when you can't fight, just for income and maybe treatment for your torn ligaments or similar.

- Be frugal

How many Rolexes do you need? Do you really need the Ferrari? How about a less expensive car and a house that is fully paid? So many fighters would spend a weekend cruising strip clubs, bars and nightclubs and come out the other side with a big headache and an empty wallet. How about that entourage of unemployed buddies hanging on? Do you need five bodyguards and seven men in your corner? Sure most fighters do not earn that much, but what part of your spending is unnecessary or just plain stupid? Fighters have many girlfriends and buddies for as long as they have money or are famous. They will all leave when you're no longer making it. If you have to choose to spend money on drinking and entertaining your unemployed buddies or enrol on a useful training course, do the course. A bigger television with the newest game console is not an investment – it is a waste and will make you waste another asset – your time. Drive the same old car for another year if you can earn a bigger deposit for the next one and save on interest. An example is Mike Tyson, who once earned USD 30 million for a fight. He declared bankruptcy due to a prodigal lifestyle.

- Take care of your brain

Yes, broken arms may heal but your brain damage is permanent. Protect yourself by having a good defence game and keeping your brain active by some form of study (reading; make a study of something or enrol on a course). Prepare for life after fighting (mentally and professionally) and start expanding your horizons.

- Choose your friends

Your unemployed buddies are already successful at being bums. You don't need their help. If you don't have friends that are good and uplifting for you, find others. Don't invite trouble.

- Integrating into society and taking your place

When was the last time you attended a social function that had nothing to do with fighting? What about your local business chamber functions, or the open day for your local golf club? You may just meet your future boss or partner or just have a good time and make friends with people who talk about other things, besides fighting and girls.

- Career options

Start working on career options early. Sooner is better, especially if you're aiming for highly skilled jobs. Most white collar jobs will take five years to qualify in. Start looking in the papers, read up on skills demands and talk to professionals in different fields.

- Qualifications

What will you do if you decide to quit? Do you have any skills? Are you a qualified mechanic or accountant or pharmacist or top-notch sports commentator? If so, are your skills current? Will you be attractive to the job market? If you've been out of your field of expertise for about five years or more, depending on the industry, you may have to start from scratch. If you don't have marketable skills, why don't you start something fresh? I've met a former army captain who started at law school in his thirties. It is never too late to start. Others went on to pursue Masters degrees and gone off into their specialised fields. If you're not earning much, start with part-time work as an apprentice or study a course online. At least you can study online from your hotel room. There are volunteer jobs in which you can build practical skills as well as a network.

- Get good investment advice

The best investments are savings, education and your house. You need good professional advice on all of them – even on your savings. Talk to an expert about your income and how to protect it. Other investments may include traditional securities, structured insurance policies and even entrepreneurial pursuits. You need not only good advice, you need to talk to many

people and do your own research before taking up on any of these. Your coaches, managers, your bookie, sparring partners and your girlfriends can't help here. Talk to professionals and check out the qualifications they should have to be legally allowed to give advice.

- Family life

Don't let your children and wife become strangers. They love you and can be your best asset. A marriage is a partnership and a supporting wife can help with advice, an additional income, a job network and security while you fight. Your children are your joy – don't be a stranger to them.

- Mind, body and spirit

Most fighters are good at taking care of their bodies and preparing mentally for fights, but very few take time on their knees and reading the Bible. Take some good advice – read your Bible and pray. You need to have inner peace. It is of no use to you to acquire the entire world and not have God on your side. Who will you turn to for help? Who will guide you, protect you and heal you? This is your single most important decision in life.

In conclusion

After all this subjective rambling, I do hope that you have taken some value out of this. Start preparing for you, because nobody will take care of you if there isn't a buck in it for them. I have been fortunate that I could make the transition into a career. Thanks to several contributing factors. Among them was my wife, her love, her support with extra income and being ringside. She also considered the toll on my body, our future and told me when it was time to quit. Another factor was that I never quit my day job. I took long leave often to stay over in other countries for fighting and training. I had a career and academic qualifications and when I retired, studied further to enhance my career skills. And I believe that a Higher hand is in control.