

## **Injury & Fan Reaction Ruin Send off**

Mark Olejniczak

I guess fans believe when they pay the price of admission, they have the right to offend and insult anyone in attendance, or the athlete performing at a particular sporting event. The reason I'm on my soap box, was the Sat. April 8<sup>th</sup> fight between Thomas Hearn and Uriah Grant.

The fight was stopped after two rounds because Hearn couldn't continue due to a severely sprained ankle, to the dismay of most people in attendance. This night was supposed to be Tommy's big send off from boxing. He would defend his IBO cruiserweight title in front of his hometown fans at Joe Louis arena.

Hearn entered the arena to, "Eye of the Tiger" (music from Rocky III) blaring through the sound system, and the fans cheering the hometown hero. Highlights of previous fights played over the scoreboard, impressive triumphs, to the disappointing losses to both Hagler and Leonard on the scoreboard.

The first round was a feeling out process for both fighters. Hearn worked his jab and Grant held his own. During an exchange in the second round, Hearn sustained an obvious ankle injury that he tried to walk off. He completed the round, having to fight part of the round on one good leg.

The official announcement came over the public address system that Hearn would not be able to continue. How quickly things change, less than 15 minutes ago there was roaring applause for the local hero. Now with the unfortunate developments in the ring, many people decided to turn on Hearn. Some in attendance began throwing plastic containers, beer, chairs, and other debris.

I realize that boxing can be seen as not the purest sport in the world, but fans need to keep some perspective on the situation.

First and foremost, Tommy Hearn is not a quitter. How quick we forget Hearn has finished fights with either a sprained or broken hand during his career. He never gave up then, and didn't on this particular evening. This wasn't a ploy by a boxing legend to stage another fight, nor was it a tank job by the champion.

I was disgusted by some fans chants of, "Your not the Hitman; You are the Quitman", then proceeding to hurl obscenities and other insults Hearn way. I have always heard how great Detroit fans are, and how they stand behind their stars. This was definitely not the case for someone who is a legend in the Motor City. Hearn is a visible community figure giving back to different organizations, and he resides just outside the city of Detroit. For him to be treated in such a manner is inexcusable.

Hearn didn't want to quit. Emanuel Steward and his corner people stopped Hearn from continuing. Hearn wanted to go back out there.

If I may pose the question, how many of you want to fight the last 10 rounds of a 12 round fight on one good leg, when you end up being a sitting duck as your leg completely gives out on you? With the storied career this man has had, do you believe he really wanted to end his career on this note.

I predict Hearn will be back to redeem himself one last time. A great athlete such as Hearn will not allow himself to leave on such terms.