

Holmes emotional at Boxing Hall of Fame induction

CANASTOTA, N.Y. (AP) — With a precise, powerful left jab, Larry Holmes reigned as heavyweight champion for more than seven years, successfully defending his crown 20 times — the second longest title run in heavyweight history.

But on Sunday, the "Easton Assassin" needed a moment to compose himself before accepting his induction into the International Boxing Hall of Fame along with 11 other champions and ring personalities.

"I'm sorry. I'm choked up a little bit. Why not?" Holmes said, receiving a sustained ovation from the crowd of nearly 1,000.

"When you get to this point, when people come out to salute you like this ... it makes you want to cry. So if I cry, cry with me because I feel good," said Holmes.

Holmes headlined the 2008 induction class, which also included junior welterweight champion Eddie Perkins and late middleweight Holman Williams. All three are in the hall's modern-era category.

Middleweights Len Harvey and Frank Klaus and welterweight Harry Lewis were honored in the old-timer category, and 19th-century Irish heavyweight Dan Donnelly in the pioneer class.

A seventh-grade dropout who forged his body in eastern Pennsylvania's steel mills and honed his boxing skills in a Police Athletic League gym, Holmes compiled a

record of 69-6, with 44 knockouts. He was heavyweight champion from 1978-1985. His 20 successful title defenses were surpassed only by Joe Louis with 25. Holmes nearly matched Rocky Marciano's perfect 49-0 mark when he was upset by Michael Spinks for his first loss.

Despite his impressive resume, Holmes always has been under-appreciated — mostly because he defended his title against any fighter, regardless of ranking or name.

"I wanted to defend the title properly. I wanted to give everybody the opportunity to fight," Holmes told the crowd, which included a large contingent of family and friends from Easton, Pa., among them his 3-week-old great granddaughter and 1980 Heisman Trophy winner George Rogers.

"I didn't get into boxing to become the heavyweight champion of the world. I didn't get into boxing to get into the hall of fame. I got into boxing to make money and pay the rent," said Holmes, now 58 but just five years removed from his last fight.

Holmes said his detractors were his greatest motivation — including famed sportscaster Howard Cosell, who Holmes remembered said "my legs were too small, I couldn't punch and I was just a copy of Muhammad Ali."

Holmes had thanks for many people who helped his

career, even singling out his sparring partners. But he gave special credit to promoter Don King for taking a chance on him from the start.

"When I was coming up, no one thought about Larry Holmes. Everybody I went to turned me down. No one would give a dime for my career," Holmes said.

"I told people I was going to be the heavyweight champion of the world. They said I was crazy. People said you can't be the heavyweight champ. Muhammad Ali is

out there. Joe Frazier is out there. Ken Norton is out there. George Foreman is out there.

"I was determined to be the heavyweight champion of the world because I wanted to prove to those who said I couldn't do it, that I could do it," Holmes said.

After an early career that included 18 months as Ali's sparring partner, Holmes beat WBC heavyweight champion Ken Norton in Las Vegas by decision on June 9, 1978, winning the fight with

a final round cited by many as one of the greatest in boxing history.

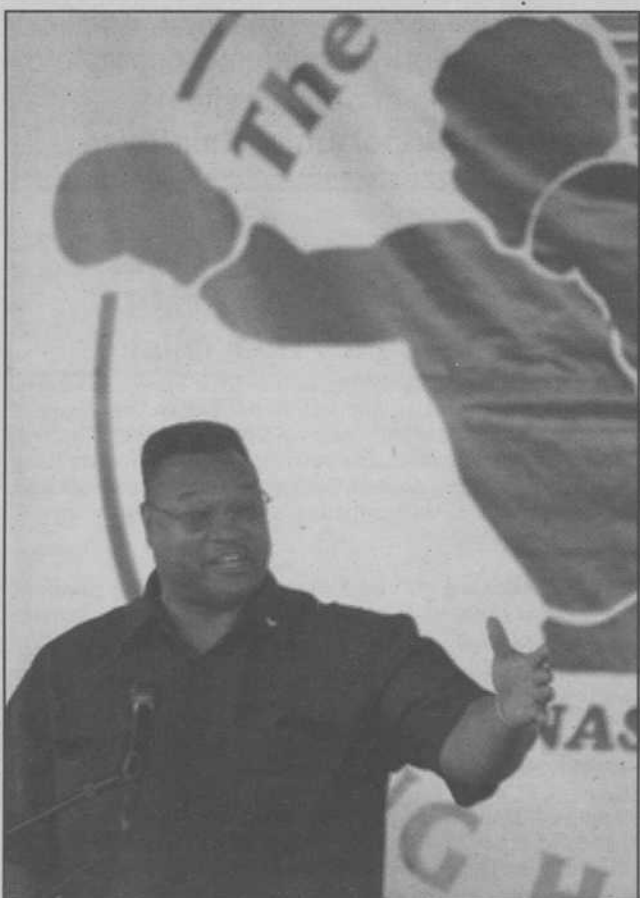
Holmes' string of successful title defenses ended in 1985 when he was upset by Michael Spinks in a 15-round decision. He retired in 1986 after losing a rematch with Spinks.

In 1988, the then 38-year-old Holmes was lured out of retirement by a \$3 million purse to challenge Mike Tyson, the undisputed champion. Tyson knocked out Holmes in the fourth round,

the first and only time Holmes would be knocked out in his career. Holmes again retired.

He returned to the ring again in 1990. In 1992, he upset undefeated 1988 Olympic heavyweight champ Ray Mercer, but lost a 12-round decision to Evander Holyfield in a title fight. Holmes got a last title shot in 1995 at 45, losing the WBC title by decision to Oliver McCall.

Since retiring, Holmes has
(See Holmes, Page 11)



Former heavyweight champ Larry Holmes speaks after being inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, N.Y., on Sunday. He had 20 title defenses.

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