

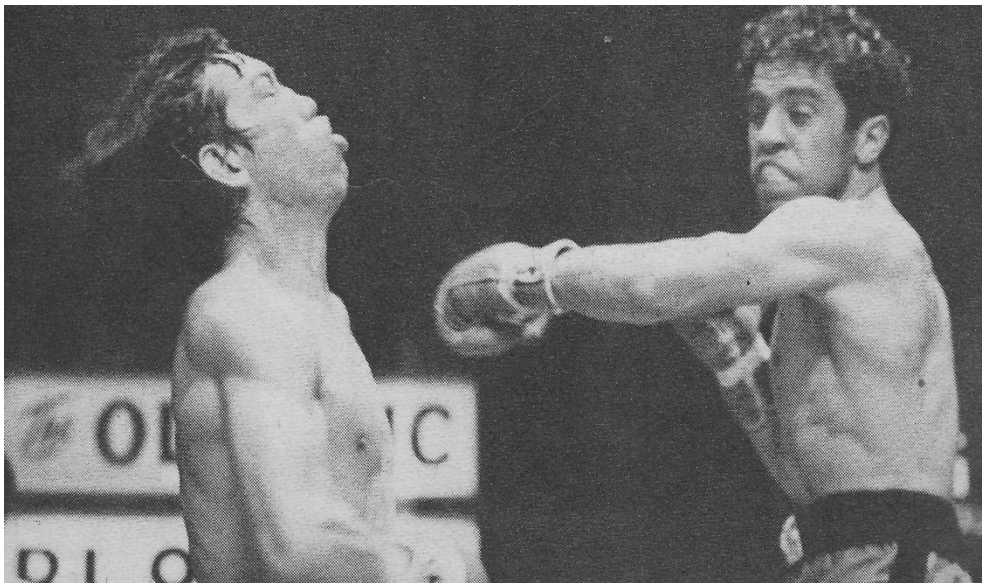
DEATH OF A SCHOOLBOY

Bobby Chacon burst on the boxing scene in the Los Angeles, California area in the 1970's like a meteor when the area was rich with the smaller weight Mexican fighters drawing record crowds. Bobby won the world featherweight title quickly and lost it just as quickly through partying and not taken his career seriously. It took Bobby 7 years to regain a world title again, surviving defeats in the ring, and a wife who committed suicide during his boxing career. Bobby's ups and downs in life read like a soap opera, and a real-life tragedy as he ended up in Los Angeles picking up cans in the street and passing away at the young age of 64 unable to remember his name.

Bobby Chacon was born on November 28, 1951, in Sylmar, California and while growing up developed a tremendous reputation as one of the top street fighters in the San Fernando Valley. Since Bobby was getting into street fights every day, his high school sweetheart Valerie Ginn, a pretty half Asian, and half Mexican girl told him that he should consider boxing professionally and get paid for his fights.

Bobby listened to his girlfriend and turned to amateur boxing in 1970, and compiled a record of 21 wins, 3 loses, and 1 draw while winning the Diamond Belt Championships as a featherweight in 1971, and 1972. After marrying Valerie, Bobby immediately turned professional in April of 1972, and enlisted the services of veteran trainer Joe Ponce. Bobby was taking college classes at California State University at Northridge and was dubbed Bobby "School Boy" Chacon while making his professional debut in April of 1972 against undefeated Jose Antonio Rosa at the Forum in Inglewood, California.

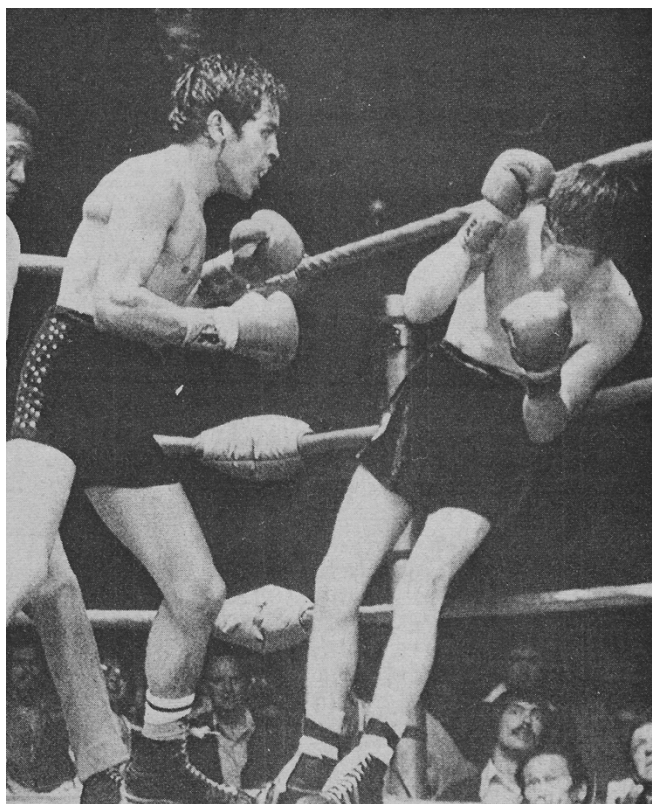
Bobby stopped Rosa in 5 rounds, and became a media darling with his good looks, friendly demeanor and slashing fists in the ring. Bobby won his first 15 fights in his first year of boxing and had his first real test when he took on top rated featherweight contender Tury "the Fury" Pineda at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles in February of 1973. Bobby destroyed Pineda with a complete arsenal of punches that included hooks, crosses, and uppercuts and powerful body shots in a wild 4th round. Bobby knocked Pineda out with a picture-perfect left hook to the head near the end of the 4th round.



Bobby Chacon hits Tury Pineda with a left hook
– International Boxing June 1973

Bobby's next big fight was against former Bantamweight Champion Chucho Castillo at the Forum. Bobby dominated Castillo and dropped him in the 10th round to win an easy decision in April of 1973 in a televised bout in the area. Joe Ponce then signed Bobby up for a fight against another former world Bantamweight Champion Ruben Olivares in June of 1973 at the Forum. Olivares took Bobby to school as he totally out classed him before stopping him in the 9th round, giving Bobby his first professional defeat.

Bobby returned to the ring in September of 1973, and reeled off 4 quick victories before setting up a huge fight with cross town featherweight sensation Danny "Little Red" Lopez at the Sports Arena in Los Angeles in May of 1974. Lopez was undefeated in 23 professional fights, with 22 wins coming by knockout.



Bobby Chacon stops Danny "Little Red" Lopez
—International Boxing October 1974

As a young college student this writer drove down to Los Angeles to watch this fight from a ringside seat. I observed that upon entering the ring, that Bobby appeared much bigger than Lopez even as they were about the same weight. Bobby appeared to be the quicker fighter in the ring, and Lopez's power shots did not seem to effect Bobby. Bobby eventually wore Lopez down with his quick combination punching in the 9th round for a technical knockout victory. The fight drew a record setting gate of a whopping 222 thousand dollars.

Bobby was now next in a line for a title fight, and he took on the veteran Alfredo Marciano for the vacant World Boxing Council featherweight title in September of 1974 at the famed Olympic

Auditorium in Los Angeles. Bobby started out the fight aggressively hitting Marciano with hard shots to the head and body. Finally in the 9th round, Bobby trapped Marciano in a corner and connected with a hard right-hand uppercut to Marciano's chin. Marciano immediately dropped to the canvas, Marciano got up before the 10 count, but was in no condition to continue the fight. The referee stopped the fight, and Bobby had just won his first world title.

Unfortunately, after winning the world title, Bobby returned to the night life, and split with his manager Joe Ponce. In March of 1975 Bobby signed to defend his title against Mexico's Jesus Estrada from Guadalajara, Mexico at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles. Joe Ponce was not in Bobby's corner for this fight but was replaced by trainer Johnny Villaflor. Bobby had to shed 2 pounds the night before the fight, to finally make 126 pounds before the title defense. Bobby survived the first round, as Estrada came out of his corner aggressively, but Bobby went all out in the 2nd round to stop Estrada with a deadly arsenal of hooks to the body and head to make a successful first title defense.

After Bobby's successful title defense, he continued his late night partying and he had to lose 10 pounds just before his title defense against former Bantamweight champion Ruben Olivares in a rematch in June of 1975 at the Forum in Inglewood, California. Bobby entered the ring against Olivares in a weakened state and he lost by a 2nd round technical knockout in a completely one-sided bout. Bobby's performance was so pathetic that the State Athletic Commission temporarily suspended his license to fight.

Bobby returned to the ring in November of 1975 and continued fighting with mixed results. He beat the likes of contender Fel Clemente but lost the 1st of a 4-bout series with Rafael "Bazooka" Limon in Mexicali in December of 1975. Bobby finally got back on track by beating faded ex-champion Ruben Olivares by decision in the 3rd fight in their trilogy in August of 1977, but then looked lackadaisical in losing a 10-round decision to veteran Arturo Leon in November of 1977.

In April of 1979 Bobby took on Limon in a rematch at the Sports Arena in Los Angeles and was leading on the scorecards when Limon was unable to continue fighting due to an accidental head butt. The bout was declared a technical draw. A June of 1979 win over Jose Torres, lead to Bobby challenging Alexis Arguello for the World Boxing Council Super Featherweight title in November of 1979. Bobby did well in the early rounds, but one of Arguello's power shots opened up a serious cut over one of Bobby's eyes and he was stopped in the 7th round due to the cut.

In March of 1980 Bobby won a close decision over Limon in their 3rd fight held at the Forum in Inglewood. Bobby suffered serious cuts over both eyes in this match In May of 1981 Bobby challenged Cornelius Boza Edwards for the World Boxing Council Super Featherweight title in Las Vegas, Nevada. As in the Arguello fight Bobby started off boxing well, but then he faded and was taking too many punches when the fight was stopped at the end of 13 rounds.

Bobby had been cut severely in his recent fights, and his wife Valerie began pleading with him to quit the ring, but she did not realize until this point that Bobby was actually also married to his ring career, and just could not quit. Valerie tried unsuccessfully to talk Bobby into moving to Hawaii with her and obtaining employment outside of the ring.

Eventually Bobby agreed to move with her near Oroville, California which was a quiet farm type community in the north end of the state. Soon after the move, Bobby signed up for a fight in Sacramento, California in February of 1982 against Valerie's wishes. Bobby easily defeated Renan Marota, and I met Bobby in person for the first time after this fight. I was introduced to Bobby by local promoter Sid Tenner and found him to be very personable. Bobby also treated me like he had been my friend for years, and always called me by my first name. Bobby became extremely popular in Sacramento after the victory and Sacramento adopted Bobby as one of their own. Bobby told the press that he wanted a couple of tune up fights, and then he wanted to challenge Rafael "Bazooka" Limon, who had just won the Super Featherweight title for the 2nd time.

I then read in the local newspapers that Bobby's next fight would be against club fighter Salvador Ugalde in March of 1982. His wife insisted that Bobby should quit the ring and she began showing signs of depression. Finally, the night before the Ugalde fight, Valerie committed suicide by gunshot wound to her head in Oroville, CA. Bobby, in an incredible state of shock, went through with the Ugalde fight in Sacramento the day after Valerie's suicide and knocked his opponent out in the 3rd round. Bobby dedicated his win over Ugalde to his wife's memory.

After the Ugalde victory Bobby fought on like a man possessed as he defeated Arturo Leon in a rematch in Sacramento to set up a rematch with Limon for the super featherweight title in December of 1982. The fight was to be in the Memorial Auditorium in Sacramento, before a packed house for the 4th bout between the two Mexican warriors. I was finally able to obtain Dress Circle tickets for this match.

Both fighters came out cautiously in the first 2 rounds, and then Limon struck in the 3rd round dropping Bobby to the canvas. Bobby got up quickly unhurt and continued to outbox Limon during the middle rounds as the action heated up. In the 10th round Limon dropped Bobby to the canvas for the 2nd time. Limon took the next 2 rounds, and starting in round 13 Chacon, bleeding from an eye cut, became more aggressive and started an all-out attack on the champion. Entering the 15th and final round, I had Bobby down in the fight by 1 point and felt that he needed a 2-point 15th round to pull out the victory. Bobby went after Limon in the final round, and finally with about 15 seconds left in the fight, Bobby dropped Limon with 3 straight right hands to the head. Everyone in the packed house stood up, and I could not tell if Limon got up and beat the count. Limon in fact had got up before the 10 count, and then the bell rang. The fight would go to a decision. Bobby was awarded a close unanimous decision due to his last 2-point round. I would say that this was the greatest action-packed thrilling contest that I had ever seen in person in my life. Bobby would later state that the crowd chanting "Bobby, Bobby" during the last portion of the fight drove him on to victory. The Ring magazine voted this fight the "Fight of the Year" for 1982 in their magazine. Bobby would also dedicate this fight to his deceased wife.



Bobby Chacone wins the title from Bazoooka Limon
—The Sacramento Bee, December 12, 1982

Amazingly Bobby did a repeat performance in Las Vegas, Nevada in May of 1983 against Cornelius Boza-Edwards in a rematch. Even though Boza-Edwards was the number 1 contender in the Super Featherweight division the World Boxing Council stripped Bobby of the title because he did not defend against Hector “Macho” Camacho. In this fight against Boza-Edwards, Bobby again came from behind to drop Boza-Edwards in the 12th round to score a come from behind unanimous decision victory. The Ring magazine also voted this fight, their fight of the year for 1983.

In January of 1984 I drove to Reno, Nevada to watch Bobby attempt to take the lightweight title from Ray “Boom Boom” Mancini. Mancini proved to be too strong for Bobby and he was stopped in the 3rd round, while he was taking punishment. This would be the last time Bobby would fight for a world title. Two weeks after this fight, Bobby would marry Melissa Mendonsa

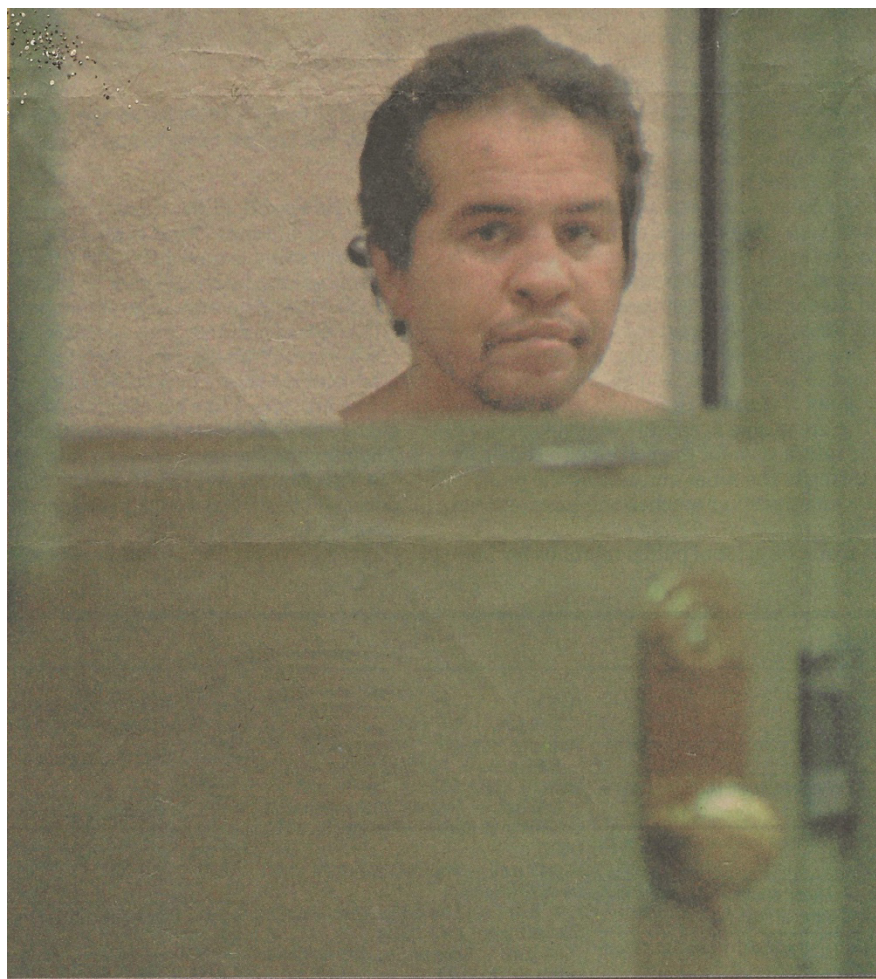
Bobby would return to Sacramento and won a couple of fights before taking on former lightweight champion Art Frias in August of 1985. Bobby was dropped in the first round but came back to stop Frias in an all-out slugfest.

Around this time period, reports were surfacing out of Oroville, California that second wife Melissa Mendonsa claimed that Bobby had beaten her up and broke her ribs. Bobby also pressed counter charges against Melissa in court. During all his legal issues, Bobby took on top lightweight contender Rafael Solis at the new Arco Arena in Sacramento. This would be the last fight I would ever see Bobby fight in person. Bobby won a convincing decision and as reported by local news sources, he did indeed seem to slur his speech in an interview after his victory. This was his last fight in Sacramento.

After ending his brief marriage to Melissa Mendonsa Bobby was quick to jump into another marriage with Renee Vincent. Bobby did not fight again for another 2 years, and after only a few months of marriage, Bobby was again accused of spousal abuse by his 3rd wife.

I read in the newspapers that Bobby won a comeback fight in Tucson, Arizona in June of 1987 when he knocked out Martin Guevara who was making his pro debut. Guevara dropped Bobby 3 times in the first 2 rounds of the fight before he was stopped by Bobby. The final fight of Bobby's career took place in June of 1988 when he knocked out club fighter Bobby Jones, in Orlando, Florida.

Bobby disappeared from the boxing scene, and then suffered more tragedy, when I read in the newspapers that his son Bobby Junior was killed in a gangland shooting in southern California in 1991. Bobby's life at this time was spiraling downhill rapidly. In 1995 I saw a photo in the Sacramento Bee newspaper of Bobby behind bars in the Los Angeles area as he was being accused of narcotic sales. I could hardly recognize him as his face looked puffy in the photo, and he had a blank look on his face.



Bobby Chacon in custody for narcotics sales
—The Sacramento Bee 1995

Boxing sources also reported that Bobby was homeless and was seen picking up cans in the streets of Los Angeles in exchange for food. Bobby still attended boxing events in the Los Angeles area, but his speech was so slurred you barely understand him talk.

In 2005 Bobby was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame, a honor that he richly deserved. Bobby would later state through slurred speech that his first wife Valerie was the love of his

life, and that he looked forward to seeing her soon. He also expressed the fact that he was sorry that he was unable to quit the ring as he was possessed to get his title back at the time.

Bobby slowly slipped into total pugilistic dementia prior to his death in Hospice care in 2016. Bobby's life read like a soap opera. At one point he was named the comeback kid, as he battled one tragedy after another in his life. I prefer to remember Bobby Chacon with all his failings, as one great thrilling boxer who left his body and soul in the ring for all fight fans to see.

Larry Carli