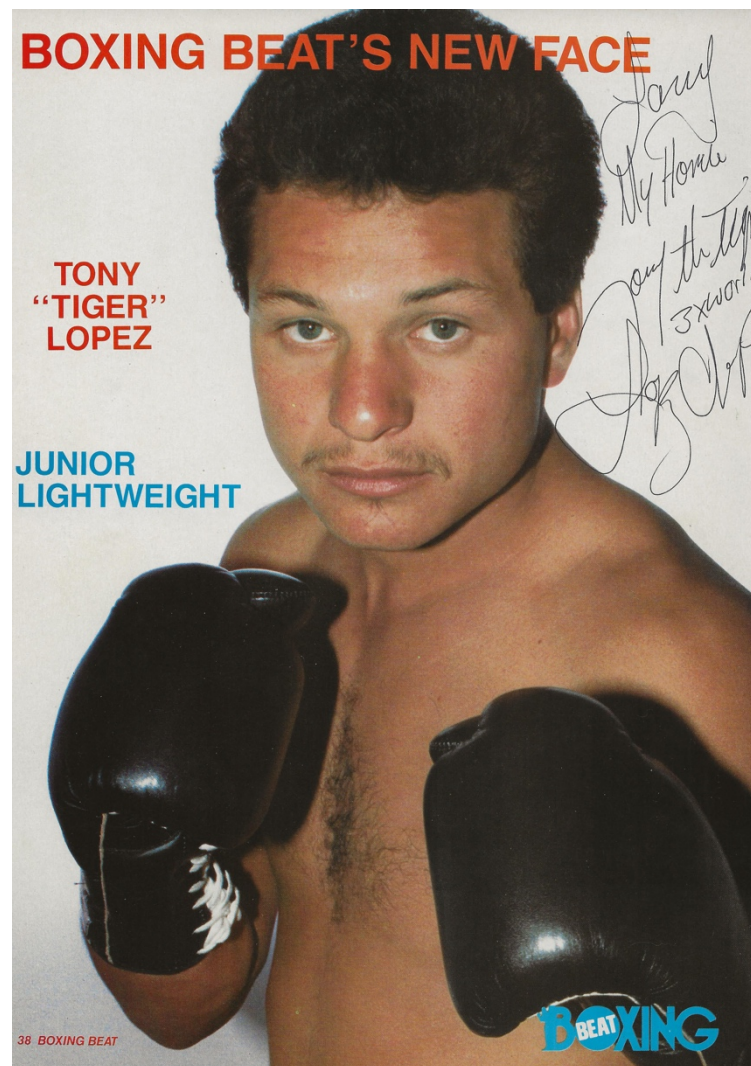


# Is the Hall of Fame Calling for three-time world champion Tony Lopez?

61-year-old 3-time boxing world champion Tony “The Tiger” Lopez sits across the table from me in a Mexican Restaurant in downtown Sacramento, California fondly recalling his fighting days

Tony started his amateur boxing career at the age of 10 in Sacramento. Tony’s older brother Sal was a world ranked super lightweight at the time, and Tony wished to follow in his older brother’s footsteps. Tony took 4 Junior Olympic titles in weights ranging from 90 to 120 pounds. Tony’s final amateur boxing record was 56 wins, 4 loses, and 2 draws. Tony won 24 bouts by knockout.

Tony gave credit to former professional boxer Jerry Jacobs for teaching him how to develop his body punching skills while fighting in the amateurs. Jacobs would eventually turn up in Tony’s corner during his championship reigns in the ring.



Tony Lopez turning professional

—Boxing Beat, 1986.

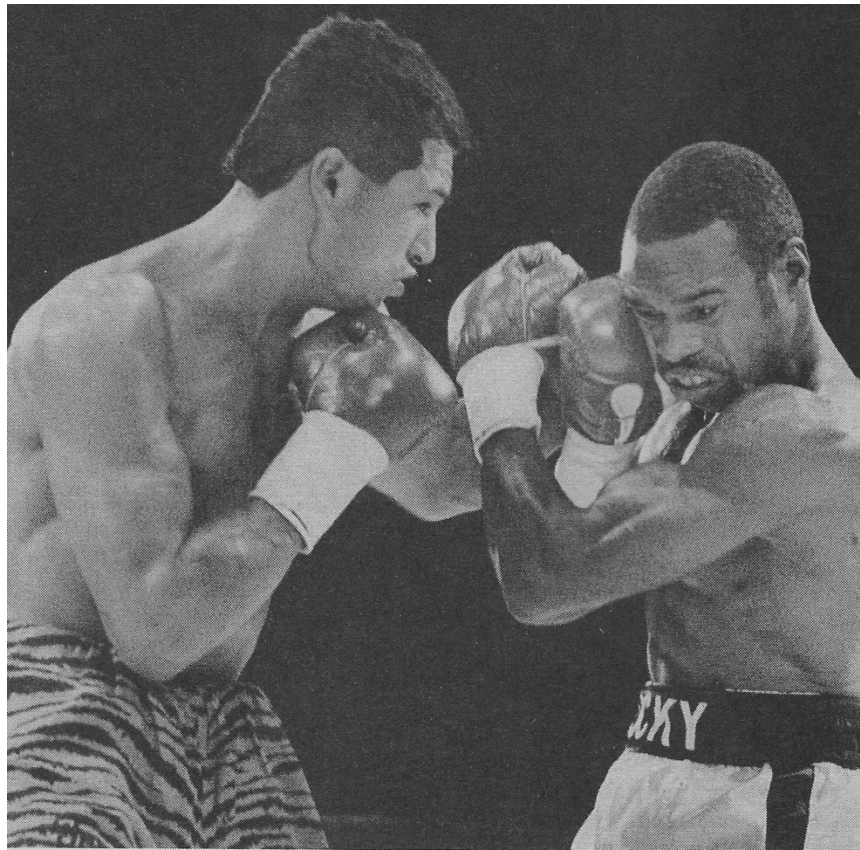
Tony turned professional in 1983 in Sacramento by knocking out Juan Rodriguez in one round. Tony ran his professional record up to 27 straight wins over a 4-year period before he was disqualified in a fight with Ramon Rico on in September of 1987. Tony explained that he knocked Rico down to one knee and caught him with another punch as Rico bounced up from the canvas. Rico went down again and refused to get up from the canvas. The referee had no alternative but to disqualify Tony in the fight. Tony got an immediate rematch with Rico, and easily knocked him out in the return match.

During this time in his professional career Tony was doing a lot of sparring with world super featherweight champion Bobby Chacon. Chacon taught Tony how to use a lot of head movement to avoid blows and how to increase the power in his body punching. Tony explained that at first he took terrible beatings from Chacon when he turned professional, but within a couple of years' time, he was holding his own in their gym wars in Sacramento. Tony emphasized that Chacon was a great guy to spar and hang out with after training. As Chacon's career was coming to an end in 1988, Tony found himself challenging Rocky Lockridge for the International Boxing Federation Super Featherweight title in July of 1988 in Sacramento.

Tony sprung a huge upset and survived an 8<sup>th</sup> round knockdown to win a unanimous decision to take the title from Lockridge. The action-packed fight was voted Ring Magazine's Fight of the Year for 1988. Tony became first world boxing champion in Sacramento's history as locals Pete Ranzany and Joey Lopes had previously failed to win the title. Ranzany was stopped by Jose "Pepino" Cuevas in the 1970's in a welterweight title fight, and Joey Lopes was stopped by Joe Brown in their 1950's world lightweight title fight.

In October of 1988 Tony defended his title against top contender "John John" Molina in Sacramento. Tony won a close and controversial decision over Molina to retain his title. Tony explained that he felt that he did just enough to win the decision, but that a rematch was definitely in order.

In March of 1989 Tony gave Rocky Lockridge a rematch for the title. Tony knocked Lockridge down and won another convincing decision over the former champion. In June of 1989 Tony defended his title against the number one contender, Tyrone Jackson from New York. The fight was held at Stateline, Nevada. Tony mentioned that Jackson was hyped by the New York press as a "can't miss" fighter who they felt would take the title from Tony. Tony explained that Jackson appeared to freeze during the fight, and that he easily stopped Jackson in the 7<sup>th</sup> round of the title fight.

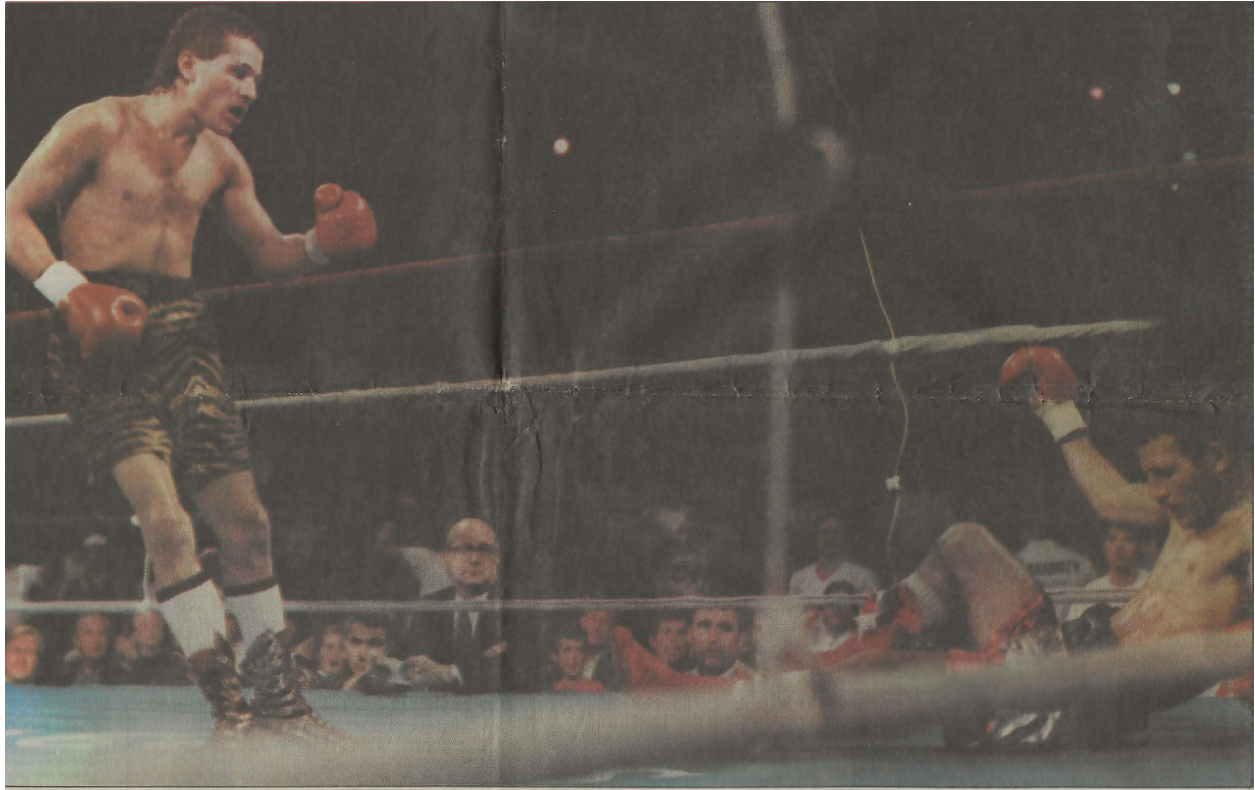


Tony Lopez wins super featherweight title from Rocky Lockridge  
— Boxing 89, March 1989.

In October of 1989 Tony gave “John John” Molina a rematch for the title in Sacramento. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> round Molina connected with a punch to the head and Molina’s elbow also slammed into Tony’s eye while the punch was being delivered. Tony’s eye immediately closed, and he fought with the closed eye until the fight was stopped by his corner in the 11<sup>th</sup> round. Tony advised that he felt pain every time Molina connected with his punches to the closed eye until the fight was stopped.

The rubber match between Tony and Molina was set for Reno, Nevada in May of 1990. Tony advised that he was in the best shape of his life in the rubber match with Molina. Molina built up an early lead in the rubber match with his rapid ring movement and crisp punching. Tony started to come on in the middle rounds with his body punching, and finally dropped Molina in the 11<sup>th</sup> round. Tony finished strong in the 12<sup>th</sup> round, to batter Molina around the ring to win a close split decision and regain his super featherweight championship.

Tony later explained that Molina was probably the best fighter that he ever faced. Tony said that Molina had great lateral movement in the ring and knew how to snap out his crisp punches in combination.



Tony Lopez takes down "John John" Molina  
—The Sacramento Bee, May 21, 1990.

In September of 1990 Tony defended his title against International Boxing Federation featherweight champion Jorge Paez. Paez was known for his clowning antics in the ring, but Tony advised that Paez was a clever and tricky fighter. Tony won a convincing 12 round decision over Paez by basically just using his boxing skills. Tony stated that Paez was a very shifty boxer in the ring, but with no real punch to hurt him with. Tony claimed that when Paez was hurt, he would just back up out of harm's way to avoid the knockout. Tony advised that he just controlled the lighter weight champion from a distance, as he knew from the beginning of the fight that Paez did not punch hard enough to hurt him.

In March of 1991 Tony had a tough title defense against South African Brian Mitchell in Sacramento. Tony described Mitchell as a slick, smooth boxer who moved well but did not have a real hard punch. Tony felt that he won a close decision, but the bout was called a draw, setting up a rematch for the title in later in the year.

Tony tuned up for the Mitchell rematch by easily and successfully defending his title against Lupe Gutierrez in June of 1991 in State Line, Nevada, thus setting the stage for the Mitchell rematch for the title in September of 1991 in Sacramento.

Tony had to make a couple of trips to the scales to make the required 130-pound weight limit for the Mitchell rematch for the title. Tony looked lackluster in losing his title to Mitchell on a 12-round decision.



Tony moved up to the Lightweight division and won 3 fights before challenging Joey Gamache for the World Boxing Association lightweight title in Portland, Maine in October of 1992. Tony entered the ring as a huge underdog to the unbeaten Gamache who was fighting in front of his hometown fans in a nationally televised fight.

Gamache jumped out to an early lead in the fight with his quick flashy combinations and rapid lateral movement. Tony started to come on in the middle rounds by aiming his blows at Gamache's mid-section and slowed him down. Tony stunned Gamache toward the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> round, and Gamache seemed hurt as he walked slowly back to his corner. Tony rapidly trapped Gamache along the ropes during the start of the 11<sup>th</sup> round and dropped him to the canvas with a series of right-hand punches to the head. Gamache beat the 10 count, but he got up still dazed, and the referee quickly stopped the contest giving Tony his 3<sup>rd</sup> world title. Tony received a lot of media exposure due to his come from behind knockout victory on national television. [Picture 4 in this vicinity-with the following caption if possible]



Tony Lopez wins world lightweight title from Joey Gamache  
—Personal photograph, courtesy Tony Lopez

In February of 1993 Tony defended his lightweight title against South African contender Dingan Thobela in Sacramento. Thobela was unbeaten in 29 fights and was a smart, smooth boxer, without a big punch. Tony had to chase Thobela in the fight and landed enough punches to win a close decision for the first defense of his lightweight title. Tony then gave Thobela a rematch in June of 1993 in Sun City,

South Africa. Thobela was given a close decision victory, but Tony insisted that he was “robbed” of the title in Thobela’s home town, even as he finished the fight strong with his body punching.

Tony moved up to the 140-pound weight limit and stopped former world lightweight champion Greg Haugen in June of 1994. Tony called Haugen a natural “tough guy” who he personally liked after the contest. The Haugen victory set up a match for Tony against World Boxing Council super lightweight champion Julio Cesar Chavez in Monterrey, Mexico in December of 1994.

Tony’s corner devised a plan to box Chavez for 10 rounds, and then go for the knockout in the last 2 rounds of the fight. Tony’s plan did not work, as he was stopped on a small cut, at the end of 10 rounds. Tony was livid about the stoppage. Tony claimed that he only received 2 stitches to close his small wound, and that he was starting to hurt Chavez with body punches. Tony felt that Chavez never hurt him during the fight, and that Chavez did not hit as hard as was advertised before the fight.

Tony advised this writer that his biggest regret in boxing is that he was not allowed to finish his fight with Chavez, because he felt that he had a chance to stop the tiring Mexican champion. This would be the last championship fight of Tony’s career. Tony continued to fight after the Chavez loss with mixed results. Tony lost fights to Freddie Pendelton in August of 1995, and to Charles Murray in March of 1996.

Tony went undefeated in 4 fights in 1997, and 1998. In September of 1998 Tony defeated Jaime Osegueda for the World Boxing Organization’s North American Super Lightweight title. Tony was ill-trained in the last fight of his career when he was stopped by Hector Quiroz for his title in Coachella, California in February of 1999.

Tony’s final ring record was 50 wins, 8 losses, and 1 draw. Tony won 24 of his fights by knockout. In world title fights, Tony’s record was 12 wins, 3 losses, and 1 draw. Tony was a 3-time world champion and has been elected to several local and California state wide Hall of Fame’s.

Upon retirement, Tony married his current wife of 25 years Cathy, who had been a serious bodybuilder. Tony and his wife then started Tony the Tiger Bail Bonds, which they owned until they closed the business during the post-Covid years due to the changes in bail bond practices in the State of California. Tony has two children, and he recently started his Tony the Tiger plumbing company in Sacramento, California.

Tony is very proud of his boxing career, and, as stated previously, his only regret was not being allowed to finish the Chavez fight in Mexico in 1994. The question still remains: why is Tony Lopez not in the International Boxing Hall of Fame? One reason may be that many iconic champions such as Julio Cesar Chavez, Azumah Nelson, and others were fighting at the same time as Tony, and he may have been lost in the shuffle of champions. A second reason may be that Tony fought out of Sacramento, California, while other champions were fighting out of major boxing cities such as Las Vegas, Nevada, Los Angeles, California, New York City, New York, and Mexico City, Mexico.

However, the ring record book does not lie, and winning 3 world titles, and 12 victories, with just 3 defeats, and 1 draw in world title fights should certainly give Tony strong consideration for the International Boxing Hall of Fame.



Tony Lopez in retirement with his wife Cathy  
—Personal photograph courtesy Tony Lopez.

Larry Carli