

Alvaro “Yaqui” Lopez

A Champion In and Out of The Ring

One would think that after five unsuccessful bids for a world title, which included two controversial decision losses, an ex-fighter would be bitter towards professional boxing. The opposite is true and Alvaro (Yaqui) Lopez is a very content man who has been happily married for over 50 years and still gives back to boxing as he runs a highly successful amateur boxing club in his hometown of Stockton, California. He also still receives requests from boxing fans all over the world for his autograph.

Alvaro Lopez was born on May 21, 1951 in Zacatecas, Mexico. Like many young Mexican youths, Alvaro dreamed about being a bullfighter in Mexico, but those dreams were smashed when his family moved from Mexico to the San Joaquin Valley in California when he was 14 years of age.

While growing up in the Stockton, California area he began doing farm labor work in the fields of the valley, and eventually met a pretty young Mexican American teenager named Beatrice “Beno” Cruz. Even though Alvaro spoke no English, and Beatrice spoke virtually no Spanish, the two teenagers fell in love and a serious relationship developed.

Beatrice’s father was Jack Cruz, a well-respected local boxing promoter in Stockton. Jack Cruz took one look at his daughters muscular 6-foot 2-inch boyfriend, and immediately began training him for a boxing career.

Cruz began teaching Alvaro the basics of boxing and entered him into a Diamond belt tournament in Eureka, California, in 1972. A large Indian population was attending the tournament and they asked Jack Cruz if Alvaro was Indian. Jack Cruz replied Yes, and when the Indians asked him what tribe Alvaro was from, Cruz replied the “Yaqui” tribe. Alvaro beat Wilfred Albers in his Diamond belt weight class in the tournament and thus the name Alvaro “Yaqui” Lopez was born even though Alvaro was Mexican, and not Indian.

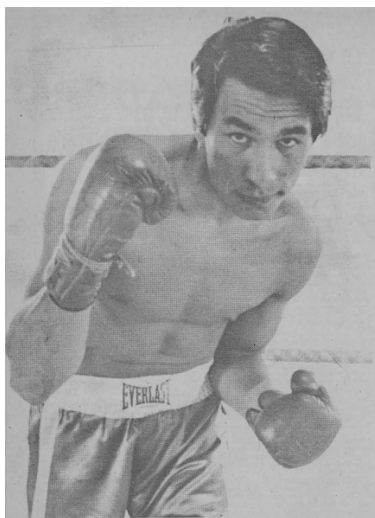
Yaqui finished with an amateur boxing record of 13 wins and 3 losses before turning professional as a light heavyweight. In April of 1972, with Cruz as his manager and Ben Casing as his trainer, Yaqui won a 6-round decision over Herman Hampton in his professional debut in Stockton. Yaqui gave Hampton a rematch in June of 1972 in Carson City, Nevada, and knocked him out.

Yaqui suffered his first professional loss in his fourth fight when he took on the slick boxing Jesse Burnett in a 8-round bout in Stockton, in July of 1972, Yaqui tired badly in the last round of the fight and lost the close decision. In November of 1972, Yaqui knocked out Herman Hampton again in Stockton, and then married his girlfriend Beatrice before the end of the year.

In March of 1973, Yaqui took on hard punching Al Bolden in Seattle, Washington. Yaqui and Bolden dropped each other 3 times during the 10-round slugfest won by Bolden. The crowd went wild during the match, and showered the ring with money for both contestants after the match.

In 1973, Yaqui entered the top 10 rankings in the light heavyweight division by winning his next 8 straight fights during the year. Yaqui defeated Hildo Silva, Ronnie Wilson, Herman Hampton, Alfonso Gonzalez, and Al Bolden in another exciting rematch to close out the year.

In 1974, Yaqui defeated world ranked Andy Kendall by a 5th round knockout in February and won 2 more 10-round decisions over a tough Hildo Silva. In March of 1975, Yaqui won the California light heavyweight title when he knocked out Terry Lee in 9 rounds in Stockton.

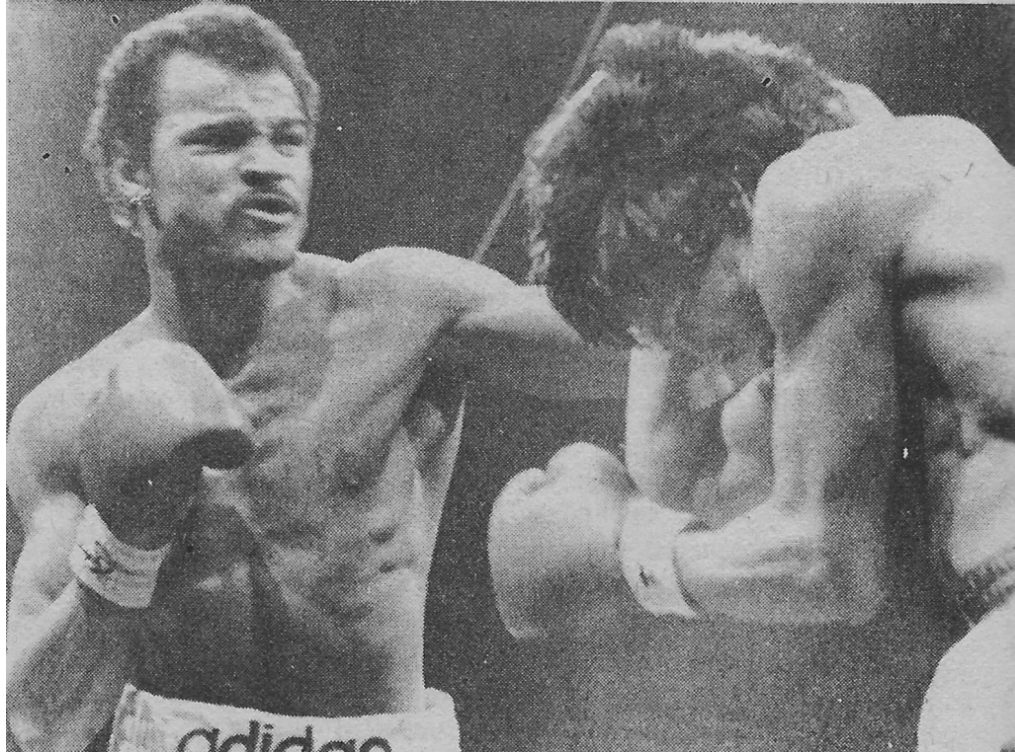


“Yaqui” Lopez in his prime. *Boxing Life* November 1974

In May of 1975, Yaqui out-boxed Mike Quarry over 10 rounds in Stockton. In July of 1975 Yaqui lost his California light heavyweight title in a rematch with Jesse Burnett by a 12-round majority decision. The fight was very close, and Yaqui was given a rematch with Burnett.

In another close fight, Yaqui regained his California light heavyweight title with a 12-round split-decision victory over Burnett in September in Stockton. After several more wins Yaqui became the number one contender in the light heavyweight division, and he was given a match with champion John Conteh for the World Boxing Council light heavyweight championship in Copenhagen, Denmark in October of 1976.

Yaqui stated that Conteh’s brother promoted the fight and, when he arrived in Copenhagen, his luggage had been lost until just before the fight. Yaqui also stated that Conteh’s dressing room had a big star painted on the door and that his dressing room was located in the basement of the auditorium.



Yaqui blocks a punch from WBC light heavyweight John Conteh in Yaqui's first try at a world title.

The Ring Magazine, January 1977

Yaqui gave a good account of himself in his first world title fight, and he made Conteh work hard to come away with a close unanimous decision victory. Yaqui was disappointed in the loss, but he regrouped in November of 1976 and knocked out Clarence Geigger and Pete McIntyre in December to close out the year. Yaqui won his first 3 fights in 1977 before losing a cut-eye technical knockout stoppage to Lonnie Bennett in Indianapolis in April. Yaqui felt that Bennett was cut worse, but the referee called Yaqui the technical knockout loser.

Yaqui knocked out Bobby Lloyd in June and Manuel Fierro in July to set up a World Boxing Association light heavyweight title fight with champion Victor Galindez in Rome, Italy, in September of 1977.

The fight was very close and rough. Yaqui boxed cleverly, while Galindez counter punched with round house punches and continually rabbit punched in the clinches. In a fight that was hard to score, the officials determined that Galindez was the winner by a close unanimous decision. The Italian crowd booed the decision, but the decision stood.

In January of 1978 Yaqui took on Fabian Falconett in the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles, California. Falconett surprised Yaqui in the first round and dropped him to the canvas. Yaqui returned to his corner at the end of the first round with a badly cut eye. Yaqui stormed out of his corner in the 2nd round and knocked Falconett out.

Promoter Bob Arum from Top Rank approached Yaqui after the fight and offered him a match in New York with contender Mike Rossman. Yaqui agreed to the match in March of 1978, and he felt that he was being used as just an opponent for the up-and-coming Rossman in the light heavyweight division. The winner of the fight was promised a title fight with Victor Galindez for the World Boxing Association Light Heavyweight title.

Yaqui reminisced that, at the weigh in for the fight, some members of the Rossman camp made some disparaging remarks about the appearance of team members in Yaqui's corner. Yaqui took out his anger on Rossman during the fight.

Yaqui was the underdog in this fight, and he came out of his corner and fought one of the best fights of his career. Yaqui mixed his attack up against Rossman with head and body punches. Rossman replied with strong right-hand crosses, but Yaqui hurt Rossman with his body punches, and Rossman was wobbling around the ring when the referee gave Rossman a standing 8 count—even though standing 8 counts were not used in professional boxing in the state at the time. Yaqui felt that the officials were doing all they could to protect Rossman in this fight.

Yaqui continued his assault to Rossman's body, when Rossman's father Jimmy DePiano entered the ring from his corner to stop the fight. The referee finally officially stopped the fight and Yaqui was given the 6th round technical knockout victory. The doctor came into the ring to examine both fighters after the fight even though Yaqui had not been hurt during the fight.

The rematch with Galindez for the World Boxing Association light heavyweight title took place in Viareggio, Italy in May of 1978. In a replay of the first fight, it was another rugged bout which pitted Yaqui's superb boxing skills against Galindez's aggressive power punching. The contest resulted in another close decision win for the champion. Again, the Italian crowd in the city booed the verdict. It just seemed that Galindez could not lose a match in Italy even though it appeared to some that he had clearly been out boxed in the ring. It also should be noted that Argentine boxers at the time were very popular in Europe, especially in France, and Italy



"Yaqui" Lopez with his wife Beatrice and their first son Yaqui Jr.

The Ring Magazine, July 1978

Yaqui returned after the loss to Galindez to take on Jesse Burnett for the 4th and final time in his career in a match for the United States light heavyweight championship in July of 1978 in Stockton, California.

Jack Cruz advised Yaqui that the only way to beat Burnett was to be aggressive and to keep him against the ropes on the defensive. Yaqui gave Burnett no real punching room and came away with the belt in a unanimous decision victory.

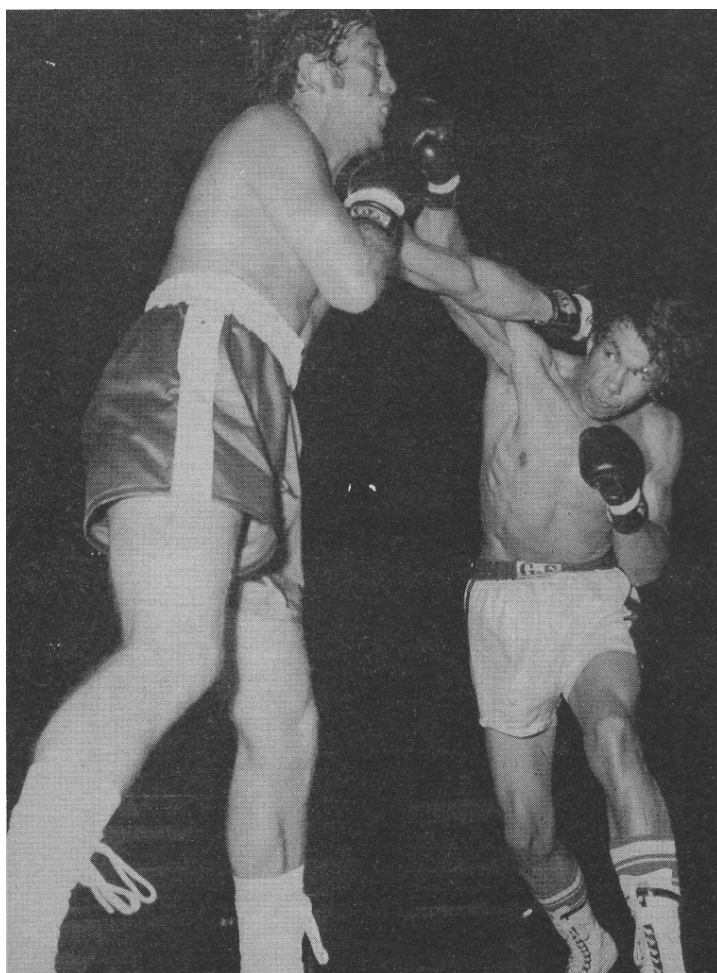
In October of 1978, Yaqui traveled to Philadelphia to defend his United States light heavyweight title against Matthew Saad Muhammed. In a very competitive fight, Yaqui was cut badly and stopped in the 11th round. Saad Muhammed promised Yaqui that if he won the world title, he would defend his belt against him.

Yaqui won 4 straight fights in 1979 before he took on prison inmate James Scott in New Jersey in December. Yaqui lost a 10-round decision, but he swore that Scott had to be on drugs for the fight. Yaqui claimed that he took a drug test before the fight, but that Scott did not take one. Yaqui also claimed that when he hit Scott with hard body punches that Scott would just look at him bug-eyed.

By the time Yaqui had knocked out Pete McIntyre and Bobby Lloyd in Fresno, California in, 1980, Saad Muhammed had won the World Boxing Council light heavyweight title and, as promised, he defended his belt against Yaqui in July of 1980 in a nationally televised bout from McAfee, New Jersey.

The fight could best be described as a real war. Yaqui came out boxing carefully and was ahead on points in the first half of the fight, but he had been cut badly. In the 8th round of the fight, Yaqui decided he must go for the knockout before the fight was stopped because of his cuts. Yaqui hammered Saad Muhammed all over the ring, and at times the referee was close to stopping the fight. Saad Muhammed could take incredible amounts of punishment and barely made it to the bell ending the 8th round. Yaqui slowly faded in the fight until he was eventually stopped in the 14th round of the title fight. This fight was given the fight of the year award for 1980 by the Ring Magazine. In today's world of 12-round title fights, Yaqui might have been given the 12-round decision, but world title fights in 1980 were scheduled for 15 rounds.

In October of 1980, Yaqui was back in the ring against future light heavyweight and heavyweight champion Michael Spinks. Yaqui was doing well in the fight until Spinks stopped him in the 7th round.



Yaqui Lopez wins a 10-round decision over Mike Quarry.
The Ring Magazine, September 1981.

Yaqui started out 1981 well with 3 knockout victories before he lost by knockout to S.T. Gordon for the North American light heavyweight title in July. In November of 1981, Yaqui traveled to Brisbane, Australia, to face Tony Mundine, who had held all the Australian belts from the middleweight division on

up to the heavyweight title. In a startling upset, Yaqui knocked Mundine out in the 3rd round in front of his hometown crowd.

In January of 1982, Yaqui lost a 10-round decision to Johnny Davis in Atlantic City, New Jersey, and then went on a 7-bout winning streak that led to a World Boxing Council Cruiser Weight title fight against champion Carlos DeLeon in San Jose, California, in September of 1983. Yaqui was stopped in the 4th round due to cuts and signs of decline in the ring. Yaqui would later state that he felt that he “just had no legs left” in this match. Yaqui could just not get away from the punches anymore.

In the final fight of his career, Yaqui lost a 10-round split decision to Bash Ali in Stockton in September of 1984. Yaqui had won a 10-round shutout victory over Ali in 1979 and retired from the ring after his loss to Ali with a final record of 63 wins, and 15 losses. Yaqui won 40 fights by knockout. I was able to verify his record through the Cyber Boxing Zone, and Yaqui’s press clipping that showed him with 2 more wins than his Box Rec total of 61 wins and 15 losses.

When asked who he felt were his toughest opponents, Yaqui advised this writer that Matthew Saad Muhammed and Al Bolden were the strongest opponents he had ever faced in the ring. Yaqui also told this writer that Jesse Burnett was a difficult fighter in the ring because of his Floyd Mayweather Junior type of shoulder roll defense and use of his head and elbows when fighting in close.

After his retirement, Yaqui obtained employment with a waste management company named Sunrise and Sunset. Yaqui has always been a sports hero to his fellow townspeople in Stockton, and upon his retirement from the Waste Management Company, he opened his Fat City boxing club in 2011. Yaqui named his gym after the movie Fat City which starred actor Stacy Keach in 1972 which was shot in Stockton. As a young amateur fighter, Yaqui actually had a role in the movie as he played a young boxer named Rosales who was sparring in the ring in the film. Yaqui also made a movie with former world boxing champion Carlos Palomino in 2015. The movie was named Callejero, and it was about an underground street fighter trying to run from his past.



Yaqui in front of his Fat City Boxing Club in Stockton, CA (2025). Author's personal photo.

Yaqui's amateur boxing club is well known in Northern California and Nevada as he travels all over the states with his team of amateur boxers. Yaqui has had as many as 50 amateur boxers in his stable.

The current female boxing star in Yaqui's stable of amateur fighters is 27-year-old Adriana Ramirez. Adriana stands 5-5 in height and fights at a solid 135 pounds. Adriana works full time as a nurse in San Jose, California, and resides in Stockton. Adriana has finished her nursing school and now has time to concentrate solely on her amateur boxing career. Adriana's current record is 8 wins and 4 losses, but a couple of the losses were on very close decisions, and the other two losses could be attributed to a lack of time to fully train and prepare for her fights. Yaqui plans on keeping Adriana busy with fights in the future on her way up the fistic ladder.



Yaqui and his amateur boxing protege Adriana Ramirez (2025).

Author's personal photo.

Yaqui has always been about helping out his family and helping youngsters in his community. Yaqui has two sons, Yaqui Junior, and Alvaro Junior. When his oldest son Yaqui Junior and his girlfriend were suffering from severe health issues and were not able to fully care for their daughter, Yaqui chose

to adopt his granddaughter Gabriela who was suffering from Cerebral Palsy. Yaqui and his wife Beatrice have constantly cared for Gabriela who is still a special needs child at the age of 18.



Yaqui and his wife Beatrice in their gym, Fat City, in Stockton, CA (2025).
Author's personal photo.

During his boxing career Yaqui was approached by world class fight trainer Angelo Dundee to train with him in Florida. Yaqui chose instead to stick with his father-in-law, Jack Cruz, as his manager. Yaqui also refused to have his father-in-law taken to a convalescent hospital in his later years and took care of him in his own home before he passed away in 2005.

Every year at their awards ceremony, the Boxing Writers Association of America passes out the Marvin Kohn Award for the Good Guy of the year. Alvaro "Yaqui" Lopez, should definitely be one of the nominees for this prestigious award in upcoming years.



Yaqui and the author outside the ring inside the Fat City Boxing Club (2025).
Author's personal photo.

