

# Renew

## Sugar Ray Leonard

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in and out of the ring

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# ON THE MOVE

Legendary boxer, international speaker  
and family man **Sugar Ray Leonard**  
on staying active and daring to dream big

By Erin Madsen  
Photos by Jeff Lipsky

Y

ou don't need to be a boxing fan to know his name. Born Ray Charles Leonard in Wilmington, N.C., it's hard to believe the shy, nonconfrontational son of Getha and Cicero went on to become one of the world's most decorated prizefighters during his 1977–1997 professional career.

“Sugar” Ray Leonard — as he became known for his sweet demeanor — got his start like many young athletes: He looked up to and wanted to be like his older brother, Roger, who took up the sport and helped start a boxing program near their home in Palmer Park, Md.

It didn't take Leonard long to become a boxing standout, surprising many, especially his mother, a former nurse and now a “feisty 92-year-old.” “She couldn't believe it,” he says, “but it was my dream.” Which soon took him to the 1976 Olympics in Montreal, where he won gold before turning pro.

Leonard's boxing dream flourished, and he was named Boxer of the Decade in the 1980s. “Sugar Ray” became synonymous with success, with Leonard becoming the first boxer to earn more ►



than \$100 million in winnings. He finished his 20-year professional career with an enviable record of 36 wins, 3 losses and 1 draw. “I’m so blessed to have been a fighter for 50 years,” he says.

★ **Life Outside the Ring**

Now 65, Leonard’s home base is in Santa Monica, Calif., where he lives with his wife of 27 years, Bernadette. Their college-aged kids, Camille and Daniel, live nearby. Life as empty-nesters has brought the couple “peace of mind and tranquility,” he says.

Leonard, who likes to start his day with a workout, keeps busy and active by playing tennis two or three times a week and regularly hitting boxing bags. “When I break a sweat, I have a smile,” he says. “I have a smile, I’m productive. I’m productive, everything’s OK.” The athlete in Leonard knows staying in shape keeps his body and mind healthy, strong and energized. “It’s rewarding. I love it,” he says, noting that by nature, he’s “a procrastinator with a capital P. When I don’t work out ... I go crazy. I’m not the nicest guy in the world. My wife tells me that!”

Another source of motivation and meaning for the Leonards comes from advancing the work of the Sugar Ray Leonard Foundation. Founded in 2009, the aim was to make an impact and support a cause close to their hearts: childhood diabetes.

Leonard says that after watching his father — who had type 1 diabetes — and other family friends deal with childhood diabetes, he decided to use his celebrity status to make a difference and help champion healthy living through diet and exercise.



Clockwise from left: Sugar Ray Leonard wins the gold medal at the 1976 Summer Olympics in Montreal; Leonard and his wife, Bernadette, attend a 2016 charity boxing event in L.A.; Leonard speaks at a Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation gala in 2009.

★ **A Less Visible Fight**

Leonard himself is no stranger to adversity. While the public saw a world-class prizefighter, the soft-spoken Leonard privately struggled with addiction later in his career. Life as a retired fighter — no longer in the spotlight, cheered by adoring crowds — unsettled Leonard, who began to abuse both drugs and alcohol.

It was his wife, Bernadette, who in

Photos (clockwise from upper left): by Neil Leifer/Sports Illustrated via Getty Images, by Amanda Edwards/WireImage via Getty Images, Beck Starr/WireImage via Getty Images

Wardrobe by Luka Buzas, Hair & Makeup by Sarah Nelson/The Wall Group

2006 told Leonard plainly, “Ray, you’re an alcoholic,” he recalls. “I looked at her, and that same day, she took me to a meeting. I was like, ‘I’m Sugar Ray Leonard. I’m not an alcoholic.’”

“It was so hard for me,” he says, “to walk into that little room with all these people who I didn’t know. I didn’t know something so small could give me something so big. It was amazing.”

Fifteen years later, Leonard regularly attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. These days, the meetings are virtual due to COVID-19 — something that initially concerned him, having leaned on meetings to stay active in his recovery.

“I just got off the phone with my AA meeting ... and that’s been a lifesaver,” he says. “I was concerned that if I couldn’t go to my meeting talk or whatever, that I’ll be in trouble or get in trouble. And that’s not been the case. It’s been solid.”

Leonard credits his mother, Getha, for the determination and strength he’s found throughout his life, and particularly in the hard work of recovery. “You have to want to be sober,” he says. “No one can help you with yourself. We can show you where to go. And what to do. But you have to do that. It’s like boxing. You’ve got to run five miles as opposed to running two miles. You have to work hard. You have to be willing to better yourself.”

★ **The World Stage**

Leonard also applies the same determination, energy and laser focus to outside pursuits. Pre-pandemic, he could be found commanding stages across the world, using boxing metaphors as a vehicle to motivate



and inspire legions of fans and those looking to learn from one of the most celebrated boxers alive.

“I miss it so much,” he says. “I thoroughly enjoy talking to people and giving my point of view, my philosophy: We get knocked down in life, we get knocked down in relationships. You do your version of road work. My road work was running five miles [six or seven] days a week.”

The traveling downtime has given Leonard a lot of time to plot what’s next, which he hopes will include an episodic documentary of his life and debuting a boxing bag for any age. “You can just sit at your house and punch around, punch it out,” he says.

Leonard hopes to reconnect with the surviving members of The

Fabulous Four, or The Four Kings — Roberto Durán and Thomas Hearns (the fourth member, “Marvelous” Marvin Hagler, passed away in March) — a group of boxers who fought each other throughout the 1980s. Once it’s safe to travel again, he’d like to tour the world with the group to meet fans and reminisce about their historic moments in the ring.

Whatever comes next, Leonard has learned that dreaming big shouldn’t stop with age. “Dreams are the window to your future,” he says. “The goals are the vehicle that takes you there. Take away those dreams? You’re stuck in a room without windows. You take away those goals? And you don’t have a map to get you to your dreams. Dream the dream. Go for it.” •



# A Boost of Energy

Spring has a way of rejuvenating all it touches. And in this issue, we’re focusing on the positive energy in everything around and within us. From spring cleaning your workout routine (page 14) to understanding the health benefits of aloe (page 5), this season is one of promise, restoration and giving ourselves a little extra energy.

Who better to talk about the power of energy than Sugar Ray Leonard? After five decades in the ring, the legendary boxer uses his energy today to inspire others as a motivational speaker, as well as to fight childhood diabetes through the Sugar Ray Leonard Foundation. He also talks to *Renew* about how he continues to keep his body and mind healthy — which still includes a few hits to the boxing bags (page 16).

And that’s just the start of the ground we cover in this issue. You’ll also be able to:

- ▶ Discover ways to help boost energy and vibrancy at any age (page 20)
- ▶ Learn how to retrain your taste buds to delight in healthy food (page 9)
- ▶ Take a deep dive into understanding and improving your mental health (page 28)

Finally, we’re taking a bite out of the season of abundance with a focus on fresh produce and ways to make it last all summer (page 24).

Cheers to a welcome spring renewal!

—The Renew Team



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Photo (cover and this page)  
by Jeff Lipsky

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