

November 24, 2012 | NY Times

Hector Camacho, 50, Boxer Who Lived Dangerously, Dies

By BRUCE WEBER

Hector Camacho, a boxer known for his lightning-quick hands and flamboyant personality who emerged from a delinquent childhood in New York's Spanish Harlem to become a world champion in three weight classes, died Saturday in San Juan, P.R., four days after after being shot while sitting in a parked car. He was 50.

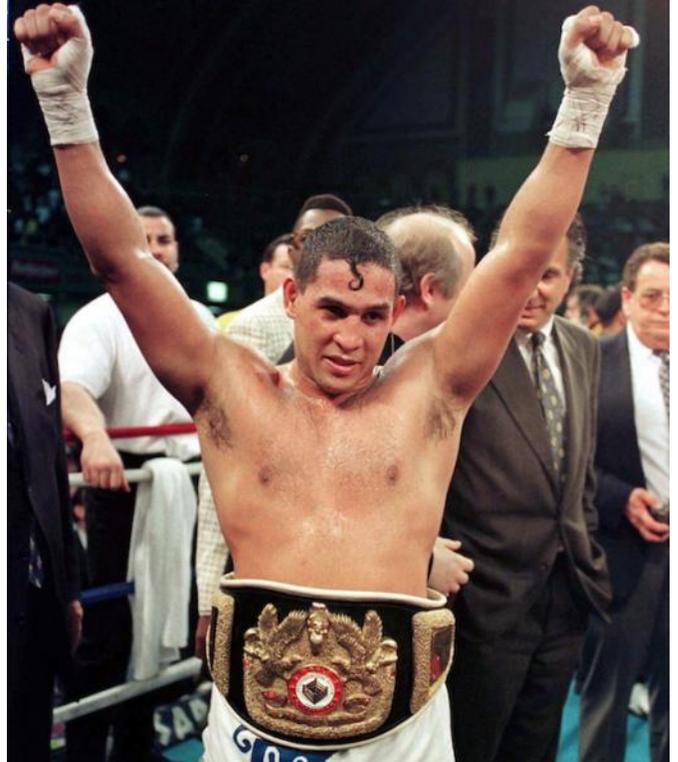
His death was reported by Dr. Ernesto Torres, the director of the Centro Médico trauma center in Puerto Rico, who said Camacho had a heart attack and died a short time later after being taken off life support. He was declared brain dead on Thursday.

The police said that Camacho was shot in the left side of the face on Tuesday night as he sat in a black Ford Mustang with a friend, The Associated Press reported. The bullet fractured his vertebrae and was lodged in his shoulder when he was taken to the Puerto Rico Medical Center. The friend, Adrian Mojica Moreno, was also killed.

The police said that two men fled the scene in a sport utility vehicle but that no arrests had been made. They said that nine bags of cocaine were found in Moreno's pockets and that a 10th was found open in the car.

Fighting in bouts sanctioned by professional boxing's myriad organizing bodies, Camacho, who was widely known as Macho Camacho, won titles as a super featherweight (maximum 130 pounds), a lightweight (135 pounds) and a junior welterweight (140 pounds). In his last title bout, at age 35 in 1997, he fought at 147 pounds and lost to the welterweight champion Oscar De La Hoya.

Terrifically agile and fast afoot, Camacho had a sackful of canny tricks gleaned from his teenage years as a street fighter; he was known occasionally to spin his opponents 180 degrees and reach around to punch them from behind. Rather than a slugger, he was a precise, impossibly rapid-fire puncher and deft counterpuncher who early on drew the admiration of the boxer who was then the avatar of hand speed, Sugar Ray Leonard.



"Not only quick, but accurate," Leonard said in 1982 after watching Camacho, then a super featherweight, dispatch Johnny Sato in four rounds. He added: "I told him that people are always asking who's going to take my place. I told him he could."

Fifteen years later, Camacho, who was six years younger than Leonard, ended Leonard's comeback attempt at 40, knocking him out in the fifth round.

In the 1980s and '90s, few boxers were more attention-grabbing than Camacho. He was known for his hairdo, which featured a spit curl over his forehead; his clownish antics at news conferences; his brashness and wit, especially whenever a reporter with a pad or a microphone was around; and his dazzling outfits. He variously entered the ring in a diaper, a Roman gladiator's outfit, a dress, an American Indian costume complete with headdress, a loincloth and a black fox fur robe with his nickname, Macho, stitched across the back in white mink.

"From now on I'm going to dominate this game," he said in an interview with The New York Times in 1985, after he defeated José Luís Ramirez to win the World Boxing Council lightweight crown, his second title.

Three years earlier, he had earned \$50,000 for whipping Sato. Camacho, who was then 20, acknowledged that this was a lot of money, but he told Sports Illustrated, "A few years ago, if I had met Sato on 115th Street, I would've done the same thing for nothing."

As a teenager Camacho was a brawler, a serial shoplifter, an admitted drug user and a car thief, and he never put that part of his nature behind him. He was arrested numerous times on charges including domestic abuse, possession of a controlled substance, burglary and trying to take an M-16 rifle through customs. This year he turned himself in after a warrant charged him with beating one of his sons. A trial was pending at his death.

Hector Luis Camacho was born in Bayamon, P.R., near San Juan, on May 24, 1962. After his mother, Maria, separated from his father when Hector was 3 years old, they moved to Spanish Harlem. He started boxing at 11 and eventually won three New York City Golden Gloves titles, though after the first one he found himself in a cell at Rikers Island, serving three months for car theft.

At 15, after being thrown out of a number of schools, he entered a Manhattan high school for troubled youths, where he came under the influence of a language teacher, Pat Flannery, who taught him to read and became a father figure, guiding him to the Golden Gloves. Flannery is credited with giving Camacho his nickname.

Camacho won his first professional fight in 1980, and he earned his first title, the World Boxing Council super featherweight crown, by knocking out Rafael Limón in August 1983. His last fight, at 161 pounds, was in 2010 in Kissimmee, Fla.; he won. His professional record was 79-6-3, with 38 knockouts.

Camacho was married once and divorced. His survivors include his mother; his father, Hector; three sisters, Estrella, Esther and Raquel; a brother, Félix; four sons, Hector Jr., Taylor, Christian and Justin; and two grandsons. Hector Jr. is also a professional boxer.

Omayra Sosa Pascual contributed reporting from San Juan, P.R.