



Mark Leduc, 47: Gay athlete, Olympic medalist

July 24, 2009

DANIELLE WONG
STAFF REPORTER

Mark Leduc was not what people expected from an Olympic boxer.

Not only did the 1992 Barcelona silver medallist come into the world weighing only about a kilogram; Leduc was a gay athlete in a profession where homophobia ran deep.

The former light welterweight boxer was expected to fail because he wasn't recognized like other "star" contenders were, said Leduc's brother-in-law, Mark Johnson. "They thought he would be the worst (on the Canadian team), but he knew how to hit people and not get hit."



HANS DERYK/CP FILE PHOTO
Boxer Mark Leduc raises his hand in victory in Barcelona Sunday Aug. 9, 1992. Leduc won the silver for Olympic boxing.

And blocking the hits was what the Canadian boxer would continue to do throughout his 47 years.

Leduc died at St. Michael's Hospital Wednesday night after he was found unconscious in a local hotel sauna early Sunday morning, Johnson said, adding doctors believe Leduc suffered a heat stroke that damaged his internal organs.

"We were shattered, disoriented, almost in disbelief. We just kept waiting for a miracle to happen," said Johnson, who had attended Leslie Street Public School with Leduc. "He's much too young."

The Olympian was born in Toronto on May 4, 1962, and grew up in the city's east end.

His younger years were troubled ones, marked by run-ins with the police and a couple years spent at a Kingston penitentiary.

But things started turning around when he became a born-again Christian in his late teens, Johnson said, adding the mayor of Kingston ended up awarding Leduc the key to the city years later.

The Toronto native went pro shortly after his Olympic success and retired after winning the Canadian super lightweight championship in 1993.

Around that time, Leduc also came out of the closet and was an active advocate for the gay community, speaking out in gay-rights documentaries such as 1994's *For the Love of the Game* and volunteering for the Toronto People with AIDS Foundation.

Ads by Google

[Sony Walkman Wearable MP3](#)

"Although stigma has changed somewhat towards HIV/AIDS, it's still prevalent for the clients we work for," said the foundation's executive director, Murray Jose. "Any opportunity to have a champion from sports (volunteering) helps."

Things weren't always easy when Leduc came out of the closet. Some parents took their children out of the local gym Leduc had opened, Johnson said. "

Leduc took up set-building in the film industry after he retired from boxing, but had struggled , although recently things had picked up, Johnson said.

Leduc, the youngest in the family, is survived by his mother and his four sisters. His older brother, Steven Parker, died in a car accident 17 years ago.

"He was a caring, giving person (who) would give the shirt off his back to you," Johnson said. "A hardworking guy that always reached for the stars."

Winning the silver Olympic medal meant the world to Mark and his family, Johnson said. "He was shocked. I think he believed the reports they were saying that he wouldn't make it very far . But he could throw like an ox and hit like a mule."

The family has not set a fixed date, but hopes to hold a funeral Thursday at the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto.