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Heartache, tragedy, triumph for Davis brothers

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Wednesday, November 14, 2007

BY MIKE HOUSER
Appeal Sports Writer

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RENO - When Jackson Buswell moved to Reno from Klamath Falls, Ore., to pursue his dream of becoming a professional boxer last year, he became part of another family.

One of nine brothers and sisters, the 28-year-old Native American hit it off with his trainer Kelly Davis and moved in with his brother, former IBF cruiserweight champion "Koncrete" Kelvin Davis. Buswell and the Davises were inseparable.

Kelvin broke his neck and back June 25 after falling nearly 30 feet off Greenhithe Bridge while training for a fight with then-undefeated Shane Cameron in Auckland, New Zealand, and it was Buswell who helped him pass the time in their northwest Reno apartment during his early recovery.

At The Stadium gym where a stoic Kelly silently struggled with the maelstrom of emotions he kept bottled up inside, it was Buswell who grew closest to his trainer and friend.

Always positive, Buswell would be busting jokes when he wasn't talking about boxing and life. In search of inner balance, he accompanied Kelvin to church, where he would rediscover God.

Kelvin has forged his own relationship with the Almighty - even more so after nearly losing his life and escaping paralysis during his fall.

And now, only three and a half months removed from his devastating injury, Kelvin will attempt to take the IBF Latino heavyweight crown from undefeated Carl Davis Drummond Saturday in San Jose, Costa Rica.

But what should be a time of rejoicing is anything but.

While Kelvin feels that Buswell has gone on to forge the ultimate relationship with the Creator, Kelly walks around mostly numb, staying sane by finding refuge in the gym.

Buswell died from brain injuries he suffered while fighting Javier Garcia to a six-round draw Sept. 20, in Calabasas, Calif.

SHATTERED

There is a unique bond between brothers and between trainers and their boxers. Having endured racism, hatred and violence during his formative years, the 34-year-old Kelly has developed a no-fly zone when it comes to letting people in. But if he has a soft spot, it's for his family and his for his fighters.

"If you love what you do, you put your love into it," Kelly says. "When they (his boxers) hurt, I hurt. I don't know how many guys Kelvin has beaten, but I can tell you the ones (fights) he's lost."

When Kelvin didn't show back up after his roadwork in New Zealand, Kelly conducted an unsuccessful search for him. It was after returning to the hotel that he was informed by hospital police that his brother was in critical condition.

After enduring years of frustration in the sport he loves - including seeing Kelvin stripped of his title due to politics - Kelly was feeling excited about the opportunity he'd forged for his brother. Against Cameron, the 29-year-old Kelvin would be fighting for three regional belts and a Top 15 ranking.

Now, looking down at the broken body of his little brother, the same one who had followed him around like a puppy dog throughout his life, Kelly's world had been tilted sideways.

"It was an experience you can't put into words," Kelly says. "It was an out-of-body experience in a way. You

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think boxing is over, that the game is over. This is real life stuff here. You make that call to your momma. You hear your momma scream and yell."

As his brother recovered, vowing to come back, Kelly went into a form of exile.

"I told him I don't want to hear that (crap), that's it's all B.S. You're trying to make yourself feel good," Kelly says of Kelvin's comeback talk. "That ain't me, bro. I could care less about boxing. He didn't have any kids - he didn't have anything. I just wanted him to be able to walk and talk and to do all he wanted to do."

TRAGEDY

Kelly put all of his energy into Bussell, who was fighting for the fourth time of his career and in 2007. Against Garcia, once a ranked amateur, Davis says Bussell was putting it all together and deserved to win the decision.

Bussell hugged Garcia and when he turned to Kelly, he stumbled and said he was tired. Kelly helped him back to the corner and squeezed a rag of water on his head. Bussell asked his trainer to hold him up for a minute.

Kelly asked him to tell him what was wrong and got him a stool. Bussell again said he was just tired. He correctly answered all of the ringside physician's questions except one: He thought he was in Reno.

"I put water on his head and back, let him get his wind back and slow his heart rate down," Kelly says, trailing off. "I was cooling him down, rubbing his back. Then he slumped forward."

It took 17 minutes to get Bussell, who was in a coma, to Northridge Medical Center, where he died the next afternoon. Kelly never left his side. In the gym, it wouldn't be manly to hug and kiss his boxer, his friend. Now he couldn't hug and kiss him enough.

When he saw Kelvin lying in a hospital bed, his future uncertain, Kelly began to have a feeling like someone was standing on his chest. Since Bussell died, that feeling has remained.

"Walking around, it's with you every day," he says. "Shortness of breath - I can't get my wind. Every single day. Honestly, I think I've lost my mind. Once my brother was able to walk again, I thought it would release the pressure on my chest. My fighter dies and every day I have this pressure on my chest. There can't be a way I can miss him any more than I do. I want him to come back. As long as I miss him (the pressure) is never going away. I wasn't ready for him to go."

ACCEPTANCE

Kelvin makes a living off getting into the ring to fight the most dangerous men on the planet, but for weeks following Bussell's death, he couldn't bring himself to set foot in his room.

Perhaps part of it had to do with some of their discussions the week before Bussell died. They talked about the dangers they faced as boxers and more specifically, dying in the ring.

"He said he wasn't afraid of dying," Kelvin says. "He was a warrior. He died doing what he loved to do. His body isn't here, but his spirit is. He's in a place we all want to get to. There is no doubt in my mind he made it to heaven."

Kelly credits Bussell's mother, Felicia McNair, for getting him out of the house and back to the gym.

"Jackson's mom, she's the best," he says. "He'd tell her at night the things he had going on - how it was wonderful and that he'd never been so happy and that he was in a place he could start doing what he loved. She'd tell me about all the things he said we'd been through together. She let me know how happy he was. For them, boxing was a family thing - brothers, sisters, the entire family boxed. We have the same (type of) momma - mine will rumble in a minute, too."

To clear the fog he was in, Kelly - who has often put on the gloves against his brother because they couldn't afford sparring partners - stepped into the ring and went 12 rounds with seven or eight sparring partners.

"I wanted to feel the pain," he says. "I wanted to feel the heat, have my lungs hurt. I wanted to feel it - every aspect of the ring... just to feel. This is my therapy - being here with the guys. Hearing the sounds of the heavy bag and the speed bag. I know Jackson was happy here. I always want to be close to him. I know he's here."

In the corner of the gym, just to the side of the heavy bags, is a plaque. It reads: "In memory of Jackson. 'Gone but never forgotten.'"

Now the brothers move on, the spirit of their friend - their brother by another mother - guiding Kelly back to sanity and Kelvin back into the same dangerous game where Bussell found happiness - and ultimately the ever after.

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