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## Earned: Andre Ward Exclusive, Part 2

By [Caryn A. Tate](#) on March 22, 2018



*"You saw throughout the course of my career, I fought every style." (Khristopher Sandifer)*

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Leaving the exceptionally difficult and sometimes heartbreaking world of boxing while undefeated and on top is nearly unheard of in the sport...

Recently I had the chance to speak with Andre “S.O.G.” Ward, who retired in September 2017 with a record of 32-0 (16 KOs). When Ward retired, he was at the top of the sport as the consensus pound-for-pound #1 fighter in the world. Leaving the exceptionally difficult and sometimes heartbreaking world of boxing while undefeated and on top is nearly unheard of in the sport. Add to that the fact that Andre faced some of the best boxers in the world throughout his 13-year career, consistently stretching himself and taking on challenges in an effort to prove himself, and you have a rare modern fighter who chose to prioritize his legacy over easier fights against outmatched opponents.

“As you saw throughout the course of my career, I fought every style,” Andre said. “I fought the Bikas, I fought the Kesslers, I fought the Frochs, I fought the Dawsons. Those are all different styles. If I’m stuck in one style, we can’t be flexible and learn different nuances and aspects of the game—I’m gonna be in trouble.”

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Thanks to Andre’s foundational coaching (as he discussed in [part I of our conversation](#)), he was a multi-faceted fighter who could make adjustments where they were needed. This ability was on display in his final two bouts versus Sergey “Krusher” Kovalev. The first bout went the distance, with Andre winning a close decision. In the second fight in June 2017, Ward shocked the boxing world when he stopped the knockout artist Kovalev in the eighth round.

For Ward and his team, the result wasn’t remotely shocking. “Everything that happened in that fight, we said it was gonna happen just like that,” he said. “You don’t know every detail, but we pretty much called it.”

Leading up to the rematch, Kovalev said he got tired in the first bout due to overtraining, that Ward got a gift decision, that the judges were corrupt. He also stated he would end Ward’s career in the second fight. Andre took notice of everything his opponent was saying.

“All the in-between stuff, all the talking that he did. If you notice, I was very quiet, I sat back and I didn’t say anything. It wasn’t that we didn’t have anything to say—it was that he was talking for both of us.

“I literally saw more holes in his game, and his psyche, and his mentality [than I did over the twelve rounds that] I fought him.”

Ward, always an intelligent fighter, knew that he could use the valuable information Kovalev was putting out there leading up to the rematch. Andre continued, “So taking all of that intel, all of that data—the physical contact that I had with him, and then the psychological stuff that I was seeing—we brought all of that stuff into the second fight.”

The night of Ward vs. Kovalev II, I was ringside on behalf of Boxing.com. As [I reported](#) then, while Kovalev was certainly competitive, Ward took over the fight from the opening round. He threw off Sergey’s normally impeccable sense of timing with feints, constant movement, and landed his punches almost at will—all while making Kovalev miss most of his shots, many of them seemingly by an inch or so. And he focused on Kovalev’s body in particular with his punishing shots.

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“The game plan just unfolded,” Ward said. “I didn’t have a set style. Sometimes I would walk him around the ring—I wasn’t running, I would walk him. Run him into shots. Get back inside. Steal wind from him. Hit him with some short body shots, uppercuts, and just—doing what I do. My inside game, and then beating him on the outside.”

It was a masterful performance—the cherry on top of an already exceptional career. Throughout it all, Andre displayed the ability to box when he needed to, to take it inside when necessary, to get rough when it was called for. Most fighters excel at one or two things, but Ward was great at all of it and could adapt any combat style depending on what his opponent brought to the table. Having different dimensions to his game was a major part of what made Ward stand out. The way he saw it, the more tools he had in his toolbox, the better.

Andre is quick to give well-deserved credit to his teachers—first his father Frank Ward, a former fighter; then Virgil Hunter, who began training young Andre as an amateur, guided him to his 2004 Olympic gold medal, and worked with “S.O.G.” throughout his entire career.

“I credit my father in the beginning and I credit Virg as I got older, just having the foresight to keep kind of—they almost kept me ahead of the game. They kept challenging me to work on things that I wasn’t good at, and they challenged me to get better in those areas.”

[Earned: Andre Ward Exclusive, Part 1](#)

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More to come in Part 3...

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