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35 years ago today, in Moscow, Russia, "The Italian Stallion" Rocky Balboa defeated "The Siberian Express" Ivan Drago via 15th round knockout in what is still considered one of the greatest wars in combat sports history ■



Many questioned Balboa's decision to fight Drago following the death of his friend Apollo Creed during an exhibition bout with the Russian earlier in the year. Balboa was criticised for failing in his duty as a cornerman by not throwing in the towel when Creed was clearly done.



Drago showed no mercy and no remorse for the former heavyweight champion of the world. Creed would pass away in the ring in what is still considered one of the darkest days in boxing history.



It didn't take long for Balboa and Drago to come to terms and agree to throw down but even the press were stunned to learn the date and location at the pre-fight press conference. Christmas day in the Russian capital.



Drago was heralded as the perfect combination of genetics and science, using some of the most state of art training facilities and equipment available at the time. The result was the highest punching power ever achieved by a boxer. A record that still stands to this day.



Balboa left the comfort of Philadelphia to set up camp in enemy territory, escaping from the media circus stateside and getting back to basics. Some say the bare bones environment, coupled with more traditional training methods helped him get into the best shape of his career.



One thing was undeniable. Both Balboa and Drago headed into their December 25th, 1985 bout with focus, dedication and in peak physical condition.



Before the contest got underway, the two heavyweights faced off for the final time, and it was in that moment Drago delivering the now iconic and infamous line.



It was a rocky start for Balboa getting dropped early on. It looked as though the fight was on course to go the same way as it had done for Creed. Drago came out strong, aggressive and with a killer instinct.



Just when the entire world thought Balboa was out, he roared back and was able to do what no man had done before; take the fight to Drago. What ensued was a back and forth battle, the likes of which we had never seen before. We were watching a classic.



In the final round of the fight the momentum was fully in Balboa's favour and after a flurry of shots, chipping away at Drago's chin, he landed one final left hook which dropped the Russian behemoth.



With Drago unable to answer the 10 count, Balboa had done the unthinkable. He had defeated one of the most terrifying fighters of all time and in his own backyard no less.



During the post fight interview, Balboa delivered a speech that proved to be very instrumental in helping ease tension between the US and Russia at the height of the Cold War.



Since then, the fight has become legendary and is thought of fondly by combat sport historians and fans alike. Two fighters from different corners of the world and from different generations, shed blood and gave their all, for our entertainment. Merry Christmas everyone.

