



Decades After Controversial Call, Olympic Boxer Seeks to Right a Wrong

The Wired Word for the Week of September 14, 2025

In the News

Last week, on his YouTube channel, world-class boxer Roy Jones Jr., 56, posted a video of a surprise visit from Park Si-Hun, the South Korean boxer who won the gold medal match against him in the 1988 Summer Olympics in Seoul, South Korea. Jones had gone to his gym in Pensacola, Florida, in 2023 for what he thought would be a routine interview. Instead, he found Park waiting for him in the ring, surrounded by both fighters' families. When he saw Jones, Park's face lit up and he called him "my brother."

"So I got in the ring to shake his hand and he give me the gold medal back," a shocked Jones said. Park, 59, lifted up Jones' arm as a sign that he viewed him as the rightful winner of the 1988 match.

"He won the gold at the time, he had the gold, but he wants to give it back to you," Park's son translated for his father. "It belongs to you."

Emmy-winning filmmaker Johnny Sweet, who recorded the reunion, told the *New York Post* it was "like watching history correcting itself in real time."

"In 1988, I was robbed of the gold medal in what became one of the biggest controversies in boxing history," Jones wrote. "By the grace of God, a couple

of years ago, the man who won that medal made the trip from South Korea to my home to return it to me, feeling it was rightfully mine."

"A boxer just knows whether he had won or lost a match," Park said. "I thought I lost because I didn't put up a fight deserving of a win. I didn't want my hand to be raised (after the fight), but it did go up, and my life became gloomy because of that."

Jones said that after the gold medal bout, Park told him "he was sorry that he lost the fight, but got the decision."

In 1988, Jones, at 19, was the youngest member of the U.S. Olympic boxing team. He had won every round of the four light middleweight bouts leading up to the gold medal final. In that fight, Jones landed 86 punches to Park's 32, and was assumed to be the clear winner of all three rounds, but the shocking 3-2 split decision went in favor of the native South Korean. As if to say he saw Jones as the real winner, Park lifted his opponent into the air after hearing the announcement.

In spite of his loss to Park, Jones received the Val Barker Trophy for the best boxer across all weight divisions at the Olympics. But the disappointment was so severe, that Jones wasn't sure he wanted to keep on boxing.

Somehow, he managed to use the setback as fuel to propel him into a stellar 34-year pro career and a record 66-9. The decorated Hall of Famer is one of the few boxers in history to win a world title in four weight classes, from middleweight to heavyweight. His last official fight was in 2023.

Prior to the Olympics, Park had been a respected amateur, winning gold at the 1985 and 1987 Asian Championships. But he never recovered from receiving the gold medal at the '88 Olympics. Tarnished by scandal, he was not honored in South Korea despite winning gold and never stepped in the ring for an organized fight again. Rather than pursuing a lucrative pro

career, he taught physical education on a middle and high school level and later coached boxing. For years, he felt ashamed by the victory and experienced severe depression and "suicidal urges."

There were allegations that East Germany, which headed the 1988 Olympic Boxing Committee, had bribed the gold medal bout judges to give Park the win, so East Germany would beat the United States in the overall Olympic gold medal count. Although the International Olympic Committee determined that it had not found conclusive evidence to support bribery accusations against the judges who voted in favor of Park, they were suspended for six months, with two of them later banned for life. The 1988 incident led to changes in the way boxing matches were scored to minimize the possibility of bias and corruption.

For more than two years after the boxers' 2023 reunion, concerned that Park might be criticized for giving Jones the gold medal, Jones didn't post about it publicly. In spite of his own disappointment over the events in 1988, Jones said, "I didn't want anything bad to happen to him. He didn't do it. The judges did it. But he suffered just like I suffered. We both suffered because of what they did, the injustice that other people did to the sport of boxing."

Park's decision to return the medal, Jones reflected, spoke less about him as an opponent and more about him as a person. "If people in the world were like that, we'd have a much better world today. ... If people could not sleep because of them doing wrong or doing bad, or doing something that was completely wrong to another person, we'd have a much better world."

Jones said he plans to give the silver medal he received at the 1988 games to Park Si-Hun. Then he plans to give the gold medal to his mother.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Roy Jones Jr. Brought to Tears as Park Si-Hun Gifts Gold Medal Decades After 1988 Olympic Controversy. *Uncrowned*](#)

[The Emotional Moment Roy Jones Accepted Gold Medal -- Decades After Infamous Olympic Controversy. *New York Post*](#)

[Roy Jones Jr. Receives Olympic Gold From Opponent, More Than Three Decades After Controversial Decision Saw Him Miss Out. *CNN*](#)

[Roy Jones Jr. Given 1988 Olympic Boxing Gold Medal From South Korean Winner \(Video 4:46\). *WEAR Channel 3 News*](#)

The Big Questions

1. What do you do when winning feels like losing? Have you ever benefited from a decision from a referee, teacher, judge or other authority figure that you felt you didn't deserve, that kept a more worthy person from receiving a benefit they should have received? If so, how did you feel about that? And what, if anything, did you do about it?
2. Should Christians care about winning or losing? Why or why not?
3. What determines our self-worth, if it is not whether we win or lose? While we may still feel the pain of losing at times, how can our faith help us keep such loss in perspective?
4. It's easy, even exhilarating, to praise God in times of success or victory, on or off the field, but what can we praise God for in times of failure or defeat? What can we learn from such experiences?
5. When do we cross the line from healthy ambition to excel to valuing victory or success above all else? How do we know when our drive to win has become dishonorable, or even an idol?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Proverbs 21:15

When justice is done, it is a joy to the righteous but dismay to evildoers.

(For context, read [Proverbs 21:13-15](#).)

Because we are fallible humans, we often fail to treat other people fairly, even when we try to do right. But God, in God's time and wisdom, always deals appropriately with us, whether we do right or wrong. To those who do right, justice brings joy, while to those who do evil, justice causes dismay, because it pulls the rug out from under their feet.

Questions: How did justice bring joy in the news article above? When have you seen this principle play out in the biblical narrative? In history? In our collective experience? In your own life?

Genesis 31:44-46

[Laban said,] "Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. And Jacob said to his kinsfolk, "Gather stones," and they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. (For context, read [Genesis 31:1-9, 36-46](#).)

After working "with all [his] strength" for his uncle Laban for 20 years, Jacob felt compelled to leave his employ. Laban had changed his wages ten times, yet Jacob believed that God had prevented Laban from harming him (vv. 6-7, 41-42).

When Laban discovered that Jacob had left, he pursued him, and when he caught up with Jacob and his party, the two men aired their differences. Laban didn't deny Jacob's allegations and seemed to accept his version of events. That allowed them to let go of past grievances and establish a

peaceable relationship going forward, which they sealed by setting up a heap of stones as a witness to their new pact and by sharing a meal together.

Questions: How does this exchange between Laban and Jacob compare and contrast with the interaction between Jones and Park in the news article? How have you worked to establish new ways of relating to former foes? What is required for such efforts to be successful?

Genesis 33:3-4, 10-11

He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother. But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ... Jacob said, "No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand, for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God, since you have received me with such favor. Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have everything I want." So he urged him, and he took it. (For context, read [Genesis 33:1-11](#).)

Twenty years after fleeing the wrath of his twin brother Esau, who believed Jacob had stolen his birthright and his father's blessing, Jacob came home, to try to make things right. Though he feared Esau, he trusted God's promise to do good to him. So Jacob prepared a present for Esau, hoping it might appease him and result in Esau accepting him ([Genesis 32:9-21](#)).

Questions: What happened to cause Esau, who two decades earlier was intent on murdering his brother ([Genesis 27:41-45](#)), to run to meet Jacob, to embrace and kiss him in tears? What happened to transform the face of Esau, his former foe, into the face of God for Jacob? When have you seen God in the face of a former enemy?

Romans 8:28-29, 37

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. [Other ancient authorities read: God makes all things work together or in all things God works for good.] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ... No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. (For context, read [Romans 8:28-29, 35-39](#).)

The RSV renders the first verse of this passage, "We know that in everything God works for good *with* those who love him." Notice the "with those," not "for those," referring to human agency and responsibility as opposed to being simply recipients or objects of God's actions.

Rugby player Pete Nicholas wrote, "God often grows us more in the valleys than he does on the mountain heights. ... loss may help you to grow more like Christ than success will."

Questions: For what good thing is God working everything together? What experiences or situations are included in the things God is working together for good? How is it possible to be "more than victorious" even in times of loss, unfair treatment, apparent defeat and disaster? What might victory look like in such times? What does it mean to "be conformed to the image of his Son"?

For Further Discussion

1. According to [Pete Nicholas](#), an ordained minister in the Church of England, "The word 'competition' comes from the Latin word *competere*, which means to strive together, to push one another on. ... through the adversarial system of having a winner and a loser, two parties are pushed to improve attaining 'faster, higher, stronger' (as the Olympic motto puts it)."

Competition in sport or in any other endeavor, such as academics, business, philanthropy, etc., can motivate all parties to strive for greater excellence.

Discuss how [Proverbs 27:17](#) and [Hebrews 10:24-25](#) speak to the way competition may lead to developing sharper skills, greater love and good deeds.

2. Reflect on this from [Encouraging Bible Verses for Sports and Athletes: Victory, Defeat, Strength, and More](#): "In the drive for excellence, it's easy to get caught up in performance and results. [Psalm 46:10](#) calls athletes to pause, trust, and remember that their identity and worth are rooted not in achievements, but in a God who is sovereign and present. ... God is present in both the victories and the losses, and ... God is there when the championships are won, but he is also there in the midst of the championships lost, the close games, the bad calls, the injuries, the loss of mentors, and more."

3. [Sportswriter David Cook](#) noticed that after athletic competitions, many people thanked God for victories, but no one thanked God for defeats, losses, injuries or humiliation.

"In the midst of suffering, our minds do not assume God's presence or influence; we do not praise God for the way life is unfolding because -- and this is critical -- we do not like the way life is unfolding," Cook wrote. "So there is no thanking God. In fact, if we're honest, we're doing the opposite: We curse and resent."

While many of us associate winning and success with God, Cook noted that "On his last day, Jesus did not hold a trophy; he was executed in the most degrading of ways. ... Jesus picked up his cross, not his trophies."

What might we learn from losses that we might never learn from continual wins? Why might success hinder spiritual growth?

4. How do we respond to injustice? Do we stop moving forward, let shame or other negative emotions keep us stationary or even push us backward, or do we accept the grace of God and use the situation as a catalyst to launch us into a more just way of living?

Responding to the News

If you are dealing with a situation in which you feel you have been unfairly treated, [this blog](#) may give you some coping tools.

Prayer suggested by [Isaiah 30:18-21](#); [Psalm 37:27-29](#); [Isaiah 61:8](#); [2 Chronicles 19:4-7](#)

God of justice, who patiently waits to be gracious to us, teach us the blessedness of waiting for you. Though you may give us the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, show yourself to us and teach us the way that leads to joy, peace and eternal life. Empower us to love justice as much as you do and to treat others fairly, just as you do. Amen.