

Shinard Bunch: The Role Model in the Making That Trenton Needs

TRENTON, NJ – It was about 18 months ago when Shinard Bunch held his 17-year-old friend, a local camp counselor and youth mentor, Tashaughn “Yungsta” [sic] Robinson in his arms, encouraging him to breathe and stop talking, but Robinson died bleeding from a gunshot wound in Bunch’s front yard. The drive-by shooting, never solved, was one of a handful of killings Bunch has witnessed over the years in Trenton, the murder capital of New Jersey.

Bunch, a 20-year-old professional boxer, has become numb to the violence that plagues his city, where he has lived since he was 13. He now focuses on becoming a world champion, a dream Bunch feels he’s not entitled to have, coming from Trenton.

“I want to be great,” said Bunch, who fights January 11 at the Hard Rock Hotel Casino in Atlantic City. “I can’t say my goal is to become a world champion, or anything really spectacular. Where we come from, we don’t make it that far. You never heard about somebody from Trenton doing something like this.”

Well, except maybe Ike Williams.

A bridge in Trenton is emblazoned with the words “TRENTON MAKES THE WORLD TAKES.” This sentiment perfectly describes Williams’ career. One of the greatest fighters of all-time, Williams was managed by the mob and hardly saw a penny for several defenses he made of his World Lightweight Championship in the 1940s. Bunch is determined not to allow the world to take from him as it did from Williams.

Bunch’s mother, Quwannia Bunch, believed her son would be a

star even before he was born. Upon his birth in Queens, NY, Bunch was named Shinard Charles Showtime Bunch by his mom.

“She always said she knew I was going to be a star,” said Bunch, whose birth certificate and calls to his mother would prove to new friends that he was being truthful about his name.

Now he goes by “Scraap,” [sic] a nickname given to him by Corey, his stepfather. Bunch’s father, also named Shinard, recently was released from prison, where he’d landed on attempted murder charges in New York. Quwannia married Corey when Bunch was 2 years old.

Corey treated Bunch’s siblings like his own children, and eventually gave Bunch another brother and sister.

“My parents don’t play,” remembered Bunch. Good grades and good behavior were expected from their son.

Bunch began boxing at the New York City PAL when he was only 5 years old. His mother had bought him a Muhammad Ali DVD, and the young boy was hooked. He followed his cousin to the gym and never left.

Bunch’s mother has had a profound impact on his career. She worked extremely hard to keep food on the table, first as a nurse and then as a security guard at a homeless shelter, sometimes going without food so her children could eat. Bunch is reverent of the sacrifices she made so that he could eat, wear nice clothes, and fight. She was ringside for his first loss, 30 fights into his amateur career. Bunch didn’t take the loss well and considered quitting the sport.

“She gave it to me that day,” Bunch said, laughing. “I acted a fool. I wanted to quit. I told her I’m not boxing. She sat me down and said, ‘At the end of the day this is what you chose to do so with that there’s always wins and losses in life, but you always gotta take a loss like you take a win. It’s right

back to the drawing board. You mad because you got your ass kicked once? You kicked thirty asses before that—are you serious?’ My family is honestly why I’m at where I’m at. My mom always pushing me. My little brother Corey is my biggest fan.”

In 2016, Bunch was on the USA national team with Errol Spence and Shakur Stevenson. He was ready to make the Olympic team, but had a lot on his mind. He was 17, and his girlfriend recently revealed she was pregnant. His father had come back into his life and Bunch was talking to him regularly. His grandmother had just died and his mother was struggling.

Bunch decided to wait until the 2020 Olympics, but waiting became tiresome and he hit the pro circuit, debuting last April with a first-round knockout. On hand for that fight would be his stepfather Corey, and his mother and father, who had reconciled and moved back to New York.

Bunch stayed in Trenton, where he knew his success could make an impact.

One of Bunch’s major gripes with Trenton is the lack of mentors and father figures in the community. It’s something he says has kept him out of trouble, despite living within a razor’s edge of drug and gun violence.

“Corey is my dad,” said Bunch. “He’s my support system. He taught me everything I know—how to be a man, how to look at stuff, how to approach stuff, literally everything. When he found out I was going to be a father, he was angry but sat me down for a very long talk. He said, ‘Listen, you sat there and did what you did and now you gotta man up to it. This is what you’re gonna do.’ He molded me to be great, and to always remember who I am. The only person that can be myself is me.”

People who know that Corey isn’t Bunch’s biological father say Bunch resembles his stepfather in his mannerisms and character. For Bunch, that’s a compliment.

Bunch is working to be a role model to Trenton's children: "Trenton is small, only 7 miles from one end of town to another. There are just not enough role models. I try to be a role model for the kids in and out of the gym. I go to schools and speak—anything I can do."

He blames the rampant drug problems in the 1970s and '80s for some of the city's woes, and the lack of leaders in the community. "We're '90s kids," he said. "Our generation is better, but there's still problems."

A win on ESPN+ on January 11 would give him new opportunities to talk about with the youth in Trenton. "Every fight is big, but this is just another level," said Bunch.

"He was 2-0, and then we were offered the Paul Kroll fight last August," said Bunch's manager, J Russell Peltz. "Kroll was 4-0. You don't usually have two undefeated prospects fighting each other that early in their careers." Bunch lost, but gave Kroll, who is one of the hottest prospects in the country, a tough fight. "His promoter, Nedal Abuhamoud and I realized we have a good prospect on our hands," continued Peltz. "We wouldn't have known that if he just knocked out another opponent. After that fight, I got excited."

Bunch, his girlfriend and 2 children still live with Corey in Trenton. The fighter has no plans to leave Trenton as his career advances, and believes he can do good.

"We need more leaders, and more role models in Trenton," said Bunch. "We need more Coreys and Yungstas." After Jan. 11, win or lose, Bunch will return to Trenton. It's a good thing, because Trenton needs more Shinard Bunches.

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