

BOXING

Tyson still exploring the highs of life

His latest act features entertainment and marijuana ventures, plus a comeback fight.

BY MANOUK AKOPYAN

Idle hands are the devil's workshop — the saying can ring true especially during a pandemic. There are few people in the world who've let their hands go more ferociously, or had more divisive dates with the devil, than Mike Tyson.

Tyson has journeyed through his roller coaster of a ride called life in the public eye since he became boxing's youngest heavyweight champion in 1986. His wild moments have been chronicled exhaustively. The stories and scenes transcend age, race and language, and he's still one of the most recognizable names in the world.

Tyson has been knocked down far too many times in life to count. Whether it be surviving a broken home, being arrested 38 times by age 13, serving a prison sentence for rape, losing hundreds of millions en route to bankruptcy, battling drug addiction, tragically losing a child or an unhealthy buffet of volatile behavior, the setbacks outside the ring have been more prolific than his losses inside it.

No matter the magnitude of the blows, however, "The Baddest Man on the Planet" always has gotten back up. It's what fighters do. Iron Mike has an iron spirit and more than just a puncher's chance at anything he tries.

Although he has painfully detailed his successes and shortcomings in a one-man Broadway show and autobiography, Tyson still is adding to his story, turning the page and starring in his latest act at age 54.

"I can't reintroduce myself. I don't know who I am either. You have to accept what you perceive from me," Tyson said.

During spring lockdown, idle hands led Tyson to exercise a lot more. He'd already knocked out a weight problem but still was sporting a paunch. Fifteen-minute treadmill runs at home evolved into two-hour sessions. Then suddenly, a ring reentered the picture, and Tyson took the internet and social media by storm when he released a series of explosive workout videos viciously hitting mitts and mauling heavy bags with the same force as in his prime.

In parallel, TV networks aired Tyson fight reruns and scored significant ratings. Sports-starved fans started wondering if Tyson would contemplate a comeback.

It turned out Tyson was wondering as well; his ego was reigned and, as he framed it, the gods of war revived him and asked for more.

Fifteen years after a faded Tyson quit on his stool against little-known journeyman Kevin McBride and retired, he announced his return to the ring against Roy Jones Jr. in an eight-round exhibition match Saturday at Staples Center on pay-per-view.

Everybody has a plan until they get punched in the mouth, Tyson once famously proclaimed.

Tyson has rolled with the punches in life, and now he'll get punched in public for the first time since 2005 — only this time as a gray-haired former boxer turned businessman looking to extend his commercial brand.

As with many of his ventures, Tyson has paired the pugilistic resuscitation with a business plan. The fight against Jones is the flagship event of his newly launched Legends Only League, a sports startup designed to bring back the stars of yesteryear and engage them in competition in whatever ways their bodies will allow.

He's also adamant that part of his \$10-million payday will be donated to charities, including Mike Tyson Cares, Standing United and My Yellow Shirt.

"Life is all about giving. We can't die with wealth. It's about spreading it," Tyson said.

Tyson says his newfound demeanor is about



MIKE TYSON performs his one-man show in March. As the former heavyweight champion, now 54, reintroduces himself, he'll fight another former champion, Roy Jones Jr., on Saturday at Staples Center.

DONALD KRAVITZ Getty Images

COMMENTARY

Boxing is an often ugly sport, but I've missed the show dearly

BY BILL DWYRE

Let's start with the obvious. The sport of boxing has no socially redeeming qualities. There is no cancer curing going on.

The same might be said of the NFL or NBA or Major League Baseball. But they at least pretend to care about creating role models for children and foundations for the less fortunate. With a little nudging, one might admit that boxing has gotten a few youngsters out of the grips of poverty. But the adult years of those same youngsters often dissolve into scarred faces and scrambled brains.

Indeed, what boxing does in a roped-off ring is called assault. Do it outside those ropes, you go to jail.

All this being said, I can't believe how much I miss it. Amateur psychologists, go ahead and weigh in.

As a reporter and columnist for this paper for many years, I attended often and wrote lots about the fights. It was intoxicating, fascinating, mind-boggling — not the stuff in the ring, but everything around and outside it. It was almost always about the show, not the fight. The boxer in the white corner and his entourage always hated the boxer in the red corner and his entourage. Hate and projected violence were as essential as learning how to talk like a stereotypical pugilist.

In retirement, I had forgotten how to say "dees guys and dem guys." I had slipped back into cultural acceptability.

Then, on a recent Saturday night on ESPN, there it was again. A big fight in Las Vegas, with all the anger and controversy and inept officiating and another overhyped mismatch and people shouting at each other and a fireworks show that was more overdone than a Super Bowl halftime and the poor broadcasters doing their best to legitimize the illegitimate.

Also, there was Bob Arum in full bloom. He is boxing's granddaddy of them all, and he was screaming and hollering at the Nevada State Athletic Commission, which is a collection of semi-competent adults paid to make sense out of the senseless.

Arum, the 88-year-old promoter (89 on Dec. 8), was so upset, his face was almost as blue as the sweater he was wearing. There is nothing like controversy in a fight Arum is promoting. He thrives on it, lives for it, turns molehills into mountains.

Writers get goose-bumpy just watching him head their way. He is about as restrained as the rodeo bull when

they open the gate. He is boxing's Bobfather. When he dies, the sport might too.

Arum was furious. The scene was chaotic. I so missed being there.

The controversy was actually over an undercard fight. Two little fighters, Andrew Moloney and Joshua Franco, were in a rematch in which Moloney was attempting to get back his title. Quickly, Franco's right eye swelled. Referee Russell Mora ruled that had been caused by an inadvertent head butt. Soon, the ringside doctor ruled Franco could not see well enough to continue, meaning a no-decision and Franco would keep the title.

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It was a lighted match on a pile of hay. Arum was Moloney's promoter.

Arum accused the Nevada commission of making a ruling to protect Mora. He ranted and raved, especially when TV cameras were nearby. The broadcast crew of Joe Tessitore and former world champions Andre Ward and Tim Bradley started raising doubts immediately. They hadn't seen a head butt, nor had anybody other than Mora. A 26-minute delay ensued while the Nevada officiating geniuses reviewed the film, allowable under a recent rule change. ESPN viewers got to review right along with them, two or three times. No head butts, just some crisply landed jabs to that eye by Moloney.

Bradley, who had fought many times in Las Vegas and lost only two fights in his career — both in Vegas to Manny Pacquiao — saw it coming. "They'll get it wrong," he said.

He was right. This is boxing. The beat goes on. The fun (fraud) never stops. There are more goodies in the weeks ahead, starting Saturday night at Staples Center, with the match the sports world has long awaited: Mike Tyson versus Roy Jones Jr. (I can't even believe I typed that).

Tyson is 54, Jones 51. In their prime, they were great fighters. They are no longer in their prime. They each won a bunch of titles and estab-

lished a bunch of boxing records. But the only number anybody needs to pay attention to here is \$49.99. That's the pay-per-view price.

The reaction has been fairly universal — rolled eyes and chuckles — but then, didn't P.T. Barnum once say something about a sucker being born every minute? There is no evidence he wasn't talking about fight fans.

Tyson was last seen exhausted and sitting on his stool, refusing to come out for the seventh round of his last fight. That was June 11, 2005. Jones, who didn't start as a heavyweight but ate himself there, last fought, and won, Feb. 8, 2018.

George Foreman, who won a heavyweight title at age 45, called this matchup "temporary insanity." Tyson is hyping it on TV promotions by saying, "I am the greatest fighter since the conception of God." So, what does that make Buster Douglas?

This fiasco is set for eight rounds, and the promotion says it won't be an all-out match but merely "hard sparring." What arrogance. Fifty bucks for "hard sparring."

On Dec. 5, Errol Spence Jr. will meet Danny Garcia in Arlington, Texas. That actually could be worth watching. The next weekend, blubberweights Anthony Joshua and Kubrat Pulev will lean on each other in London. Then, on Dec. 19, Canelo Alvarez is scheduled to come out of his 2020 hibernation for a fight in San Antonio against Brit Callum Smith, who has the name identification in the U.S. of a Detroit Tigers utility infielder.

Something is bound to happen in each. Tyson might bite the referee's earlobe. Officials might get it wrong in a close fight between Spence and Garcia. The heavyweights might demand to use oxygen between rounds, and Alvarez might refuse to fight unless he is made king of Mexico, with a percentage of the country's gross national product.

The only disappointment is that Tyson Fury — who is named after Mike Tyson and who, perhaps in honor of his namesake, once licked the blood off the neck of an opponent during a fight — has postponed his next outing to next year. That's a real blow to my fight watching because Arum is his promoter.

In any case, driven by my apparently incurable disorder, I'll be watching, except for the Tyson-Jones fiasco. Even I'm not that sick.

Bill Dwyre is a former sports editor of The Times.

living selflessly and using his power and platform to change lives. This is the sentiment he repeatedly shares while burning through mounds of marijuana.

Recently, the Brownsville, N.Y.-bred and now Newport Beach-based Tyson has been steadily growing his cannabis company and Tyson Ranch brand from its El Segundo headquarters.

Tyson is now even-keeled and mild-mannered. He once unnecessarily apologized during our 2019 interview, a far cry from his self-destructive days when he could blow up and berate anyone sitting across from him.

He previously detailed how he'd gone sour on the sweet science, and how he got hives and sweats anytime he was near a boxing gym.

"I was always a nobody and boxing made me somebody," Tyson said. "I feared myself, because I wanted to live up to that fake image."

Tyson and Jones both insist their fight won't be some sham or ballyhooed ballet peppering shots and looking busy. They both are promising a real fight, although the California State Athletic Commission has told them to engage in a friendly and glorified sparring session using 12-ounce gloves over two-minute rounds to limit damage to the quinquagenarians.

Tyson says fighting and competition still give him a twinkle, and many still are willing to pay \$50 to see what he has left in the tank.

"When I'm on that stage, my subconscious hates that person," Tyson said. "I have to ask my wife and people what I was like in my 20s and 30s."

"I don't really even remember my boxing career, or how I felt in particular fights. In my conscience and my ego, maybe I have shamed myself from that profession, so I blacked that out. I have guilt from that particular field that I was in."

For the purpose of this fight, Tyson has abstained from marijuana, but the business opportunities that come with his association in the industry are burning brightly.

Tyson already licenses his likeness on cannabis strains such as Purple Punch and KO Kush, and he's welcoming discovery platform Weedmaps to be one of the main sponsors of the fight, hoping to help pave a path for other cannabis companies to partner with major sporting events.

Tyson also is reintroducing himself to the public and portraying his evolution through scripted entertainment.

In the coming year, he will star in the TV series "Rolling With the Punches," in which he'll show what it's like to manage a marijuana farm, all while trying to replicate the acting gravitas he showed in the "Hangover" franchise in a "Curb Your Enthusiasm"-like role.

There's also a biopic in the works starring Jamie Foxx, and a handful of other original content series.

But the granddaddy of them all is set to be Tyson Ranch, a 1,400-acre marijuana-themed resort near Desert Hot Springs, scheduled to open by the end of 2023.

The space is designed to be replete with hotels, restaurants, concerts, lazy rivers and even a marijuana university, so that the "disenfranchised can unite and be the amalgamation of just one love," Tyson said.

"This is a company that I am really high about," Tyson said.

"It looks like it's going to be a massive success. My ego says I want world domination. I want to be the best cannabis company ever. No one can be in my league. They'll get crushed' ... but that's the guy I don't want to be."

Boxing gave Tyson everything he had but it took it back.

"If my ego left, I could never reinvent myself," Tyson said. "If I was steering my ship, I wouldn't be here [and alive today]. I'm not smart enough to live in this universe on my own free will."

"Young Mike believed he was God, and old Mike asks God to have mercy on his soul."