Written by Frank Lotierzo
Friday, 21 March 2003 18:00

As a child growing up our parents always stressed to us around Christmas time to be good or we won't get any presents from Santa Claus. Wasn't it great believing that some fat man with a beard wearing a red suit who didn't know us would bring us what ever we asked for on Christmas Eve! Then around 3rd or 4th grade some kid would ruin it telling you that Santa Claus is fake and it's your parents who actually buy you the presents! When you finally accept that Santa was a myth you can look back and smile remembering how fun it was believing. Some of us to this day believe in another form of Santa Claus, only this Santa goes by the name of Mike Tyson. The fairy tale of Mike Tyson had some of us believing that he was on his way to becoming possibly the greatest heavyweight champion in history? I'm that 4th grader here to tell you that it was all a myth and was never close to being what the fairy tale would try to lead us to believe.

I have watched the amateur and professional boxing career of Mike Tyson since 1982. I have never seen a fighter who has been afforded so many excuses by the public. Never have I heard more fans make excuses for a fighter after suffering a loss. As of this writing he has been beaten 4 times, knocked out in three of his defeats with each one more severe, and he quit in his other defeat before he was stopped. Against Buster Douglas his fans say he threw the fight or he was drugged, why was it that they couldn't accept him being beaten. I've even heard some say Holyfield waited until Tyson was shot before facing him, which has to be the most uninformed opinion in history! It was Holyfield who was shot when he and Tyson met in November of 96. Most fail to mention that Holyfield is 4 years older then Tyson, and he has faced the very best the heavyweight division has had to offer, which cannot be said about Tyson. Holyfield also has had a much tougher career then Tyson because of him not being blessed with one punch knockout power, many of his fights turned into wars and going the distance. In fact Holyfield resurrected his career off the wins he scored over Tyson. I've even have had fans tell me that Tyson should be rated above Holyfield in the overall ranking of histories greatest heavyweight champions. How can that even be said in jest ? Not only has Holyfield clearly beaten Tyson twice but he had the better career. He's fought fighters that Tyson avoided and has faced and defeated better fighters then Tyson throughout his career, no boxing fan or historian can question this. Holyfield proved he's clearly the better fighter period, why can't some Tyson fans accept it?

How about his defeat by Lennox Lewis? Again some try to convince themselves that Mike was drugged or wasn't himself. Do you realize Frank Bruno put up a better fight vs Lewis then Tyson did. The fact of the matter is, Mike Tyson was never as good as the media or fans thought or wanted to believe he was. He's been a front runner against overmatched opponents and he's been thoroughly beat by the best fighters he's shared the ring with. A review of Tyson's career leads to only one conclusion. However physically talented he may be, he is maybe the most overrated champion in heavyweight history. He has been the loser of the three most important fights of his career, and that is not an opinion it is a fact.

When reviewing the career of Mike Tyson it must start with the exceptional job done by his

management team. Tyson managers Jim Jacobs and Bill Cayton did the best marketing job in history with Tyson. Remember how they circulated a highlight tape of the fighters first 5 pro bouts to the mainstream sports media and writers. He was matched so perfectly with opponents that he would not only beat but he would look like something from out of this world in the process. Make no mistake Mr. Tyson can punch with both hands, and he is extremely fast for a fighter who hits as hard as he does. And he is a great front runner.

However, a close examination of Tyson's career reveals several telling facts indicating that he is not all that he was built up to be. His first 20 opponents are probably among the worst of any heavyweight at the start of their career. He actually fought guys who were inactive for three years and had lost their last 8-10 fights by knockout ! He won the WBC title from 32 year old Trevor Berbick in Nov 86 to become the youngest heavyweight champion in history at age 20. This is the same Berbick who was knocked out in one round by Bernardo Mercardo.

Tyson then wins the WBA title in March 87 from Bonecrusher Smith by decision, Bonecrusher was stopped in 12 rounds by Larry Holmes in Nov 84, and Tyson only decisions him 3 years later. He then goes on to win his title-unification bout with undefeated Tony Tucker by unanimous decision in August of 87, however the only fighter who was hurt or shook in the fight was Tyson by a Tucker uppercut. After a 7 round stoppage of 15-0 Tyrell Biggs he stops 38 year old Larry Holmes in 4 rounds in Jan 88. Holmes hadn't fought in two years, trained on a rowing machine and tread mill and only sparred a few times at his own gym, and had no training camp. Holmes said before the fight needed 3 million to pay off a building. The best testament to Tyson's punch is that Holmes was never stopped before or since. After Holmes Tyson goes to Tokyo to fight the human blimp Tony Tubbs. Tubbs is in such good shape he comes in at 237 pounds forfeiting a 50,000 $ bonus for not coming in 230 or below. Tyson does what he should and blows Tubbs out in two rounds.

In his next fight he beats former Lt. heavyweight champ Michael Spinks in one round in June 88, this is what his whole career is built on. Remember this is the Spinks who got a gift decision over 36 year old Holmes two years earlier in their rematch. However impressive Tyson was vs Spinks, in my book beating an old overfed Lt. heavyweight is not a pass to the Hall of Fame. After a brief marriage to Robin Givens he fights china chinned Frank Bruno in Feb 89 and TKO's him in 5. Bonecrusher Smith knocked out Bruno for a 10 count in Feb 84, Tim Witherspoon also knocked out Bruno for the count in July 86. Why is it so monumental when Tyson TKO's him 5 years after Bonecrusher and 3 years after Witherspoon. This is the hysteria I could never understand after some Tyson fights.

In July of 89 he stops Carl "The Truth" Williams in one round, (Quick hook by Ref Randy Neuman), the Truth had been KO'd for the count by Mike Weaver in 86 on Tyson-Ferguson undercard. Once again Tyson is perceived as a boxing immortal off a stoppage of a fighter who's known to have a questionable chin. Then comes Buster Douglas. Going into the Tyson fight Douglas had been KO'd in 3 of his 4 loses. In his title shot before Tyson he was KO'd by Tony Tucker, or as some have said he quit. This is some guy to lose your title against when you are about to turn 24 and in your absolute prime. Yes this is close to Tyson's prime, punchers mature much sooner then boxers do. I guess if I told you going into the fight that Douglas was in the best shape of his life and Tyson was in the worst shape of his career you would've picked

the 42-1 underdog Douglas? Tyson should be eliminated from all-time status for that defeat alone. How could he get knocked out by a stiff like Douglas, I don't care how bad a shape he was in, he was in good enough shape to drop Douglas in round 8 with one right uppercut after getting shellacked up to that point in the fight. Maybe if he hung on to lose a decision it wouldn't be so terrible but he was knocked out by a STIFF, not TKO'd but KO'd. Douglas affords Tyson another record, the youngest fighter to lose the heavyweight title.

After being dethroned by Douglas Tyson scores first round knockouts over Henry Tillman and Alex Stewart, obvious confidence builders for Tyson's shattered psyche. Next is Razor Ruddock, the one arm bandit. Before talking about Tyson-Ruddock, let's not forget that Ruddock was KO'd by journeyman Dave Jaco prior to this. Tyson-Ruddock I, Tyson once again is the benefactor of quick hooked referee Richard Steele as Ruddock lives up to one arm bandit billing. However it must be said that other then a brief Ruddock flurry that shook Tyson in the 6th round Tyson was in complete command. Tyson-Ruddock II, Tyson wins a 12 round unanimous decision after dropping Ruddock in rounds two and four. Ruddock actually stands up to Tyson and Tyson accounts him self very good proving that he is the better fighter. Then after serving 3 year jail conviction for rape Tyson is released from prison and fights boxings version of murders row, starting with Peter McNeely, (Remember Ali fought Second ranked Jerry Quarry in his first fight after his exile which was 43 months, Tyson's absence was 47 months) followed by Buster Mathis Jr, Frank Bruno and Bruce Seldon as their names say just about all you need to know about them. Mathis couldn't punch, Bruno and Seldon had no chin. However we can't forget that Tyson paid Lennox Lewis 4 million $ so he didn't have to fight him, thus clearing the away for Seldon.

After the Seldon farce he fights Evander Holyfield in Nov of 96. This is Holyfield coming off the two worst fights of his life. He was KO'd by Bowe in the 3rd match up between them in Nov of 95 and couldn't even put down former middleweight Bobby Czyz in May of 96. After Holyfield is cleared by the Mayo clinic he fights Tyson. Holyfield goes on to knock Tyson down in round 6 and thoroughly kick Tyson's butt before stopping him in round 11. Oh' Holyfield hadn't scored a stoppage over a heavyweight since Bert Cooper in Nov of 91 but he stops Tyson. After one postponement he and Holyfield fight again. Tyson by quitting in this fight says more about him than if he got knocked out again. When Tyson realized that he was on his way to being stopped by Holyfield for a second consecutive time he wanted out. So he hid behind the ref crying about being head butt by Holyfield. Isn't that something, the fighter who made a career out of hitting on the break and after the bell looks to the referee to save him. Tyson is DQ'd in round 3 for biting both of Holyfield's ears. This is after a stern warning from ref Mills Lane to Tyson for biting Holyfield's ear the first time. After Tyson is threatened with disqualification he goes and bites Holyfield's other ear the very next time they clinch, he wanted out of the fight. By biting and acting crazy he saved his career because he convinced the public he was so mad at Holyfield that he wanted to injure him, he even went so far as to push Holyfield after the fight while his back was turned !

As a result of biting Holyfield the Nevada boxing commission revokes Tyson's boxing license. After 6 months of inactivity Tyson returns to the ring and fights six nondescript opponents before facing Heavyweight Champion Lennox Lewis in Memphis. The twice beaten Lewis is recognized as the worlds best heavyweight and true champion. Lewis provides Tyson a chance to redeem

himself for the poor showings against Holyfield and a chance to lay claim to again being boxings premier heavyweight. Lewis suffering one punch knockout loses to Oliver McCall and Hasim Rahman is thought to be just right for Tyson by some due to his chin which has come under it fair share of criticism. On June 8th 2002 Lewis inflicts Tyson with the worse beating of his career. On this night Lewis bust Tyson's face up knocking him down in round 4 and knocking him out in round 8. A sullen Tyson can only offer praise and respect to Lewis in ring center after the fight while wiping the sweat from Lewis' face with his hand. Since Lewis Tyson has fought one time, scoring a 49 second KO of Clifford Eitenne in what has been a staple of the type fight Tyson returns with following a defeat.

When evaluating Tyson the fighter it must be stated, physically he may be as gifted as any heavyweight champ in history other then Muhammad Ali. He has very quick hands that carry knockout power in both. He was somewhat elusive to hit with upper-body movement, not quite the bob and weaver as Frazier but still effective. Some have questioned his chin, I don't. He's been stopped by non-punchers in Douglas and Holyfield but this was due to absorbing many blows throughout the fight. Tyson has a sturdy chin, its what happens to him inside when he gets hit. Tyson's make up inside is his short coming, those traits identify him more then his physical skills.

I once asked Larry Merchant to compare Frazier and Tyson. He said the difference between Frazier and Tyson is, "Frazier was a mile wide and a mile deep, Tyson is a mile wide and an inch deep". When Tyson has been confronted by an opponent who came to win instead of getting paid he's folded every time !

The true test of greatness is how a fighter reacts in the face of adversity, or how he handles defeat. When Tyson has been in with fighters who caved in front of him he was a wrecking machine. He killed guys like Berbick, Stewart, Tillman, Seldon, and Francis. Who has Tyson defeated among his 50 victories that merit anybodies top ten list ? Tyson has been beaten 4 times, three times by knockout and once he quit before he was stopped. Every time he's been beaten its been worse and has followed form. A game start, however if the opponent stood up to the assault he crumbled.

As mentioned earlier, Tyson was the best hyped fighter in history. The public fell in love with him and wanted to see him register a knockout, the opponent didn't matter, it could've been anybody which is who it was a majority of the time. He's fought set-ups his entire career, not that the outcome was pre-determined but their was always and angle. Fighters were coming off long periods of inactivity, or they where tailor made for him like Eitenne. In some fights the fighters were well past their best days or in the midst of a long losing streaks. One only needs to look at the circumstance surrounding the first Holyfield fight to see that Tyson has always avoided, a true challenge. ! Holyfield was in the middle of the worst rut of his career coming off being stopped by Bowe and an awful showing against Czyz in his two previous fights. Their was no public out-cry or demand for this fight, Holyfield was not considered any more then a faded ex-champ going into his fight with Tyson. The determining factor in putting this fight together was the fact that Tyson deemed Holyfield safe, and Tyson knew Holyfield would be the fighter

he would be measured against in his era. Tyson wanted a win over Holyfield, even the watered down eroded version was good enough ! After having everything in place to beat Holyfield, Holyfield proves he's the better fighter and takes him apart.

I ask, is this the body of work of an all-time great? I thought great fighters were supposed to win the so-called signature fights of their career ? The Tyson fans have all kinds of reasons and excuses for his defeats. The bottom line is that you can search all day and you'll never find that signature fight on his resume.

He's been knocked out and has quit in the biggest fights of his career, and he has no excuse other then he was not good enough. The truth is that he's more remembered for his defeats then his victories, what other great heavyweight can you say that about?