

Kostya Tszyu Talks Title and Sharmba Mitchell

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Two of boxing's most talented pound-for-pound fighters will square off in a highly anticipated rematch when International Boxing Federation (IBF) "Super" 140-Pound Champion Kostya Tszyu defends his title against Interim IBF Junior Welterweight Champion Sharmba Mitchell Saturday, Nov. 6, 2004, on SHOWTIME CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING. In the co-feature, World Boxing Organization (WBO) Junior Featherweight Champion Joan Guzman will defend his title for the second time when he takes on WBO No. 13 contender Marcos Licona. SHOWTIME will televise both world title fights from the Glendale Arena in Phoenix, Ariz., at 9 p.m. ET/PT. (delayed on West Coast).

Tszyu: It is great to be here. It is great to be back in the States. Everything has gone well and this is the beginning of winter. The weather is so beautiful. I am pleased, after a long time, to be coming back and I will try to put on the best show I can. I want to thank SHOWTIME again for supporting me for many years. Question: How much of a concern is it to come back and defend your title without having fought for so long? Was there ever any consideration to taking a tune-up fight?

Tszyu: Not at all. I am satisfied and I do not want to have any tune-up fights. I am always able to outperform myself mentally and physically. I have been in the gym all the time and I can say I have had good preparation and good fighting preparation with great sparring. I am sharp. I am living a very healthy life and I do not think I need any tune-up fights.

Question: Do you think that Sharmba's inability to finish the fight the first time will have an impact in this fight from a mental standpoint?

Tszyu: I am just hoping that he is in great form and this particular time we will have no questions and that the best man is going to win. There will not be any excuses for either of us. I know I will not have any excuses for me. I am in the best form. I believe he is in the best form. Now, we need to see who the best fighter in the world is now.

Question: A lot of people thought Trinidad looked even better than he had previously after his lengthy layoff. Do you feel you will be able to fight at a similarly high level?

Tszyu: I believe so. Felix fought a tremendous fight against a very dangerous opponent and he did what he was supposed to do because he is at a different level. I believe I am at the same level as Felix Trinidad. Sharmba is a great boxer, one of the best, but we need to prove that we are in a lead group.

Question: Is it a concern fighting a guy who uses speed, quickness and movement in being able to find him given that you have not been in the ring for a long time? **Tszyu:** As I said, I do not feel any concern with my form. That is the reason why I am taking this fight. Whatever is going to be will be. It will be (my) plan against (his) plan and I am very confident with myself. We will see what will happen on the day of the fight.

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Question: Do you feel you need to have a dominant performance and a decisive victory to prove to your detractors that you are still the champion that you were two years ago?

Tszyu: I need to do my best and that is what I am planning to do. Boxing is a funny thing. It depends on how you feel the day of the fight. I am preparing hard and I am ready for this fight. There are no excuses why I should not produce the best show I can. That is why I am here and that is what is motivating me to do my job. Question: How do you answer those critics who say your layoff will be bad for you?

Tszyu: I do not need to prove anything by talking. I will prove to them by doing something (in the ring). That is why all the critics will change their view after the fight. I will tell them that the layoff does not concern me off. Actually, it was not a layoff. It was an unfortunate happening. Everything happens for a reason in life and even though I did not fight, I have been in the gym.

Question: You have been boxing as a pro since 1992; how much longer do you think you can stay at the top? **Tszyu:** I always take it a fight at a time and I always go over things with myself after fights. I am always looking at what kind of desire I have before each fight. When I finish this fight, I will come home and have a little rest and then think about the future. Because I am in a great form all the time, even when not fighting, it all depends on how much I want to do it and we will see after the fight.

Question: From 1995 on, you fought about two to three times a year. Do you think that plays a big part in your longevity in boxing? **Tszyu:** Probably, because I am fresh. And even at 35, I am still fresh. I only had 32 fights as a professional. I am living a healthy life. I have a family. And that is why my career can go so long without any problem.

Question: Where and how did you develop your unique punching technique? You punch very straight.

Tszyu: The punching pattern comes from your head. You have to practice thousands and thousands of times every single day. I am a perfectionist at anything I do in life, and to get this punching pattern or punching accuracy, you have to just practice millions of times until you can feel in your head that you have done perfect. Question: Does it bother you that while you were injured and unable to fight that the IBF named Sharmba Mitchell the Interim World Champion?

Tszyu: No. I think it is a fair way. In some way, I can see (where) it would be a little unfair because I did not fight for a long time and the organization did not have a champion. I believe they put the Interim Champion in knowing that when the real champion was ready, they could meet and find out who the real champ is. I do not mind this. But with all this other stuff, like the Super Champion, it is difficult to understand. I think we need to go to only one champion. And at the end of the day, I am who I am and Nov. 6 we will see completely who the champion in this division is.

Question: Is there any real personal animosity between you and Mitchell?

Tszyu: I believe it is nothing personal between us because we do not know each other and we

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do not spend much time together and we live in different countries. Everything about the business now is trying to prove who the best fighter in the world is. The best way is not talking, but doing it. So in the ring, we will see what is going on.

Question: Do you typically study films and have you studied films of Sharmba's fights and, if so, what can you tell us that you have learned that might be any different in terms of how you are going to present yourself this time around?

Tszyu: Of course, I study fights a lot. I did look at all his last fights against everybody and I know his strengths. I am not going to go over special tactics or special strategy for the fight. I have seen that he did change a bit. He does not really like to move too much now. But again, it is against somebody else and not against me. And it will be a different story against me. It really is hard to say and think what exactly you are going to do because a fight is a fight. You are planning one thing and then in the ring everything will change. You have to prepare two or three different plans and one of them will work.

Question: Do you feel this time around that you will not have to deal with his speed and movement as much?

Tszyu: I am ready for everything. If he wants to mix it up with me, great. If he on the run from me, excellent. If he want to charge and push me back, again, beautiful. Whatever is going to be done, I do have some plans prepared for everything.

Question: In your intensive training, have you changed anything?

Tszyu: There is always something different. You cannot have exactly the same approach all the time. You have to have some variation of your movement, variation of your plan. You cannot step in the same rerun twice, you have to make adjustments.

Question: What was it like in the two years that you were not able to fight?

Tszyu: It was a little frustrating, but here is another thing worth mentioning: Everything that happens in life, I try to turn into my favor. Otherwise, life would get boring. This particular time, again, I just kind of looked for fun with my family, with my kids and my little daughter, who got to know and see what was happening with her father. Everything happens in life, as I said, it happens for a reason.

Question: How many kids do you have?

Tszyu: I have three. Question: What ages?

Tszyu: They are 10, seven and two.

Question: What do you think about Ricky Hatton as a possible opponent in the future?

Tszyu: Ricky Hatton is a good fighter, a very exciting fighter, with big popularity in his

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homeland. I will look at it this way – what people want, what people demand, that is what will make it. If SHOWTIME is going to be happy because they have to play a big role in this, then we will make the fights happen.

Question: How do you feel about Ricky Hatton stating if he was your next fight, his pressure would break you down?

Tszyu: He believes so. He is a young fighter with tremendous pressure. I am not looking past one fight at a time. If it is going to happen, and he is going to be the No. 1 contender for my IBF title, then we will see. If everything goes well, then we will fight and we will see.

Question: In your career, you have fought so many more quality opponents than Hatton. Does it bother you when you hear guys demanding fights with you and talking in the media like apparently Hatton has been doing?

Tszyu: I am sure Ricky wants to fight, but it is not his problem. His promoter has done a good job for him to try to get the money for himself because he is always packing the stadium in Manchester without fighting anybody.

Question: It seems like that one of the problems with boxing is that guys like that can fight nobodies and then demand to fight the undisputed champion. Shouldn't there have to be some proving ground where they have to beat somebody in the top five or top 10 to prove that they are worthy of fighting the undisputed champion?

Tszyu: Maybe, but it is very hard to make that as a rule because, first of all, the promoters are going to be against it.

Question: In the first Sharmba fight, it became kind of a wrestling match because of all the holding that Sharmba did. How will you react this time if Sharmba comes out to you and holds you in the fight as he did in the first one.

Tszyu: I will have to pull myself and be ready for it. If he is going to hold, he holds.

Question: Who do you think has the mental edge coming into the second fight?

Tszyu: I think I have the bigger mental edge because I know what I am capable of doing. I know Sharmba's fast. In looking at all his fights, he is always fast in the first four or five rounds and then he slows down. I do not like to slow down. I usually put more and more pressure on as the fight progresses. I know I am ready to fight for 15 rounds if I need to in a very high pressure fight.

Question: Do you remember feeling a change in Sharmba when you started to get to him a little bit more in the middle rounds? **Tszyu:** Of course. I think after the fourth round, in the fifth, sixth and seventh rounds, I completely dominated him and was when he started to slow and his reactions slowed.

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Question: How important is it to you to live by a family lifestyle and is being a devoted family man a big part of your success?

Tszyu: I believe so. When you have great people behind you, who you can rely on 100 percent, it is so important. It makes anything you do in life that much easier. As I said, I have a great family. I have some good friends who are like my family, who I can trust 100 percent and that is very important when you have people like that behind you.

Question: Do you think that the lifestyle that you live outside the ring can affect your life inside the ring?

Tszyu: It has helped me to maintain my training regime. I am 35 and I am still fighting without any problem. Question: Does your wife attend your fights?

Tszyu: No, not anymore. She has not attended one for a long time. She does not even watch my fights. Usually, when the broadcast starts, she goes for a long walk. When the fight is over, we have many people in the house watching the fight, but she just waits for the phone call saying that the fight is over and she can come and watch it on the replay.

Question: Does she just get too nervous?

Tszyu: Probably. And I understand why, especially when the person who she loves is not having the best time in the ring. It is not an easy time in the ring. And she is just not interested to see that.

Question: Does your oldest child go into the gym and would you encourage him to go into boxing?

Tszyu: I am not encouraging him to do anything. But I will always support him in whatever decision he makes. He is playing very good soccer right now and he is very athletic himself.

Question: Provided that you come through the Mitchell fight without injury, how many times would you like to fight in 2005 and how soon would you like to fight again?

Tszyu: It all depends on how the fight will go this time and how much desire I have for the next one. But if everything goes well, I would love to fight a bit more often next year, maybe two or three fights possibly. . Closing Comments.

Tszyu: I am ready, 22 months has been very long for me and I just cannot wait to step in the ring and try to do my best. I am a prizefighter who is willing to show all my best things in the ring. I do not want to talk too much. I want to show my business in the ring.