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Over the next couple of weeks many will write the obituary on Mike Tyson's career and evaluate his place in Heavyweight history. Since I've already written on where I place Tyson among the greatest of the greats, there is no need for me to write on that.

In his last fight versus British Heavyweight Danny Williams, Tyson was stopped in the fourth round. Just as in his previous four defeats, the fight with Williams followed a familiar pattern. Against Williams, Tyson came out in the first round throwing bombs looking to end the fight. In that round Tyson landed some big shots on Williams and shook him pretty good. Tyson, along with Jack Dempsey, is the fastest starting Heavyweight Champ in history. In those first couple rounds he is very dangerous, as his record is comprised of many early round knockouts. This is also what helped him become boxing’s biggest draw since Muhammad Ali

For the first couple rounds, Tyson is a cyclone. The anticipation of that early onslaught has intimidated many fighters. It is a scenario that played out many times when Tyson fought, resulting in him having many fighters beat before their hands were wrapped. Ten days prior to the Tyson-Williams fight, I wrote what I thought Williams had to do in order to have the best chance of beating Tyson.

When I outlined what I thought Williams had to do to beat Tyson, I emphatically pointed out two things that were absolutely paramount. The first thing I said Williams had to do was not be intimidated by Tyson. Tyson is a master at seeing through his opponent and sensing their fear. I also stated that Williams had to extend the fight. What I meant by extending the fight was making it through the first two rounds. I said the longer the fight went, the more Williams chances of winning increased.

One of the reasons Williams was thought to have no chance against Tyson was because many in the British press reported that Williams was known for succumbing to pressure. If nothing else was a given in this fight, Tyson applying mental and physical pressure on Williams was. How Williams handled that pressure would determine whether or not he even had a chance to compete in the fight.

On July 30th, 2004, Williams accomplished the two most important things a fighter can do when facing Tyson, and the fight followed a familiar pattern, resulting in Williams scoring the biggest victory of his career. To the surprise of many observers, Williams was not intimidated by Tyson at all and showed up to fight, instead of just to survive and get paid.

The other thing Williams did that he had to do was make it out of the first two rounds. Although he was hit hard during the first two rounds and was obviously shook a few times, he didn't come unglued and he fought back. Once Williams made it through those first two rounds, he was half way home and on his way to beating Tyson.

The loss to Williams is the fifth defeat of Tyson's career. One thing that has always amazed me

while observing Tyson's career, is the fact that when he is hit back hard, he stops fighting. I noticed that as far back as 1986 when he was still trained by Kevin Rooney. The fact is when Mike Tyson is hit, he goes into a shell and stops fighting for periods during the round. For anyone who has closely watched Tyson fight from the start of his career, this shouldn't be ground breaking news, it's stood out to me for years.

What is it about Tyson that when he gets hit cleanly he stops fighting? Mike Tyson has been a two round fighter his whole career. Any fighter who showed up to fight him, who wasn't afraid and who made it through the first few rounds usually competed with him. The key was just making it out of the first few rounds. Once Tyson had to fight beyond the third round, he would become predictable. His pattern would be to just follow his opponent around the ring looking to end the fight with one punch. Tyson also becomes very stationary and easy to hit once he starts to slow and tire.

After three or four rounds his combinations and punch output start to decrease. Along with his aggression starting to cease, his inner confidence fades and self-doubt creeps into his mind. Just looking at his face in some of his defeats you could see he was second guessing himself. It's been the same pattern throughout his entire career. That to me is the biggest reason why I never hailed Tyson as great a fighter.

All one has to do is look at his record objectively. What one sees is that Tyson beat two fighters who didn't fold in the first couple rounds and extended the fight into the later rounds, Tony Tucker and Razor Ruddock. Yes, they are the only two fighters Tyson defeated who fought back hard and late into the fight. Tucker and Ruddock were both very good fighters, but not great by anyone’s standards. The only other times in Tyson's career where he had to fight into the second half of the fight were against Buster Douglas, Evander Holyfield, and Lennox Lewis, and he lost convincingly to all three.

There have been three great fighters since the 1920's who fought a swarming pressure style like Tyson. They are Dempsey, Marciano, and Frazier. The difference between them and Tyson was they had an abundance of stamina. In the cases of Marciano and Frazier, they got stronger and more aggressive the longer the fight went, and they both carried their punch late in the fight. Another thing separating Dempsey, Marciano, and Frazier from Tyson is they never lost confidence and stopped fighting when met with an opponent’s incoming punches.

When an opponent fought Dempsey, Marciano, or Frazier, the best chance they had was to try and catch them in the first one or two rounds before they got warmed up and into the fight. Their opponents knew the longer the fight went, the less their chances of winning and the more they'd get worked over. When fighting Tyson the opposite applies. Get through the first couple rounds and your chance of winning increases.

In his fight versus Williams, Tyson held to form. Williams made it through the first two rounds and picked up the pace in the third. Tyson, as expected, slowed down and stopping fighting, throwing wild shots in desperation. As he tired he became almost a sitting duck as his confidence dwindled. Once Tyson is reduced to throwing one shot in return during the exchanges, it's only a matter of time before he mentally accepts defeat and goes out.

This is not an indictment on Tyson's chin, because he has a very good chin. However, every time Tyson has been in a give and take fight, he's lost. He has never pulled out a fight he was losing, or came off the canvas to win one. His fans can talk about his combination of hand speed and power all they want. Tyson's lack of toughness to fight through adversity is his most telling weakness and says more about him as a fighter than anything else.

HBO broadcaster Larry Merchant was an original investor in the Cloverlay Corporation. The Cloverlay Corp bank rolled Joe Frazier's career from 1965 through 1974. Merchant also covered Mike Tyson's career from his pro debut through his prime 1985-90. I once asked him to compare Frazier and Tyson. His exact response was as follows.

"Joe Frazier was a mile wide and a mile deep," Mike Tyson is a mile wide and an inch deep." Nothing I have ever heard or read sums up Mike Tyson's shortcomings as a fighter as profoundly as Merchant’s words.

For the record, I've always felt that Tyson was overrated at his peak by many writers and fans. If talent alone determined greatness, then Tyson is among the greats. However, talent is only a part of what determines an athlete or a fighter’s greatness. That being said, Mike Tyson is not one of the top-ten greatest Heavyweight Champions of all time. However, if excuses count, then maybe a case can be made for him?