I felt sad after watching Mike Tyson's pathetic performance against Kevin McBride, but that feeling was quickly replaced by one of relief when Tyson said he would not fight again. Hopefully he means it, because he has reached the point where he would find more dignity playing a villain in professional wrestling than acting the buffoon in boxing.

While I felt sorry for Tyson, there were a couple of occasions while covering boxing for *The Associated Press*
when I felt embarrassed for fighters and wished I were not ringside. The fighters were Muhammad Ali and Larry Holmes.

Ali had not fought in a little more than two years, but he looked in fighting trim at 217½ pounds, and his legion of fans were ready to crown him heavyweight champion once again when he challenged Holmes on Oct. 2, 1980 at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas.

"I am the master of illusion," Ali said, predicting he would fool Holmes (and Father Time). "I've defeated myself. I've defeated temptation. I'm not the same man who announced this fight."

What you saw was not what you got. Medication for a thyroid condition had more to do with his weight than lack of training did, but there was no pill or tonic that could restore reflexes ravaged by time, tough fights and inactivity.

After the opening bell it soon became apparent that the 38-year-old Ali did not belong in the ring with the 29-year-old Holmes, who was at the peak of his career.

Did Ali really think he could win or was an $8 million purse worth the risk of being embarrassed or injured? Only he knows.

The chants of "Ali, Ali" flooded over the ring in the early rounds. The chant could be heard in later rounds also, but by then it sounded like whistling past the graveyard.

The Greatest had nothing. Throughout the fight, Ali's corner implored him to throw punches. He simply could not.

I have watched the tape of the fight several times. A total of eighteen punches landed is the most I could give Ali credit for in ten rounds. His biggest round was the fourth when he landed four punches, including two fair right hands. Ali landed no punches in the second, ninth and tenth rounds.

At first Holmes, a former sparring partner of Ali, appeared tentative, but it quickly became evident to him, if not too many of the fans, that Ali was trying to pull a rabbit out of a hat without having a rabbit. Holmes scored at will, but to his credit he often held back as if hoping someone would stop the mismatch.

After the tenth round, trainer Angelo Dundee, getting a nod from Ali's manager, Herbert Muhammad at ringside, told referee Richard Greene to stop it

Ali fought one more time, on Dec. 11, 1981, against Trevor Berbick at Nassau, Bahamas, and I believe it was because he did not want his career to end while he was sitting on a stool.

"The stage is set for me; I love this sort of situation," said Ali, who weighed 236 1/4 pounds and whose roadwork consisted of walking and stopping to talk to people. "After I beat Berbick, I'll be welcomed everywhere," he said, as if he were not already one of the most the most recognized personalities in the world.

Ali picked up another $1 million in losing a decision by five points on each of two official cards and by three points on the third.

"I did good for a man almost forty," Ali said. "If he had been forty he couldn't have beaten me."

Berbick was twenty-nine.

Ali's farewell, a financial flop promoted a fly-by-night operator named James Cornelius, had a down-in-the-heels carnival atmosphere.

The outdoor show at the 11,000-seat Queen Elizabeth Sports Center, which was full, started late because no one could find a key to the front gate. There were not enough gloves, so some of the preliminary fighters had to wear gloves that had been previously used, and when a round ended the timekeeper rang a cowbell. After the Ali-Berbick bout, all the ringside officials left, so Jay Edson had to referee, score and keep time for the walkout match.

Almost seventeen years after the Ali-Holmes fight I was in The Theater at Madison Square Garden to cover the 47-year-old Holmes fight against 22-year-old Maurice Harris, who had a 9-8-2 record.

At the final bell, a spent Holmes walked to his corner and said, "It was a tough day at the office."

Holmes had controlled opponents with a left jab when he was the dominant heavyweight in world in 1978-85, but that night he had just been out-jabbed.

"I thought I won by one point," said Holmes after winning a ten-round split decision in his first fight since he had lost to Oliver McCall in 1995, in his final bid to become a champion again.

Holmes lost the McCall fight by three points on one official card and by one point on each of the other two. It was would have been a good time for him to retire for good. He didn't need money, but he seemed to feel a need, felt by countless other fighters. Call it a need to hear the roar of the crowd. Call it just a need to compete, to be a fighter, not an ex-fighter.

Harris, outweighed by 43 pounds by the 248-pound Holmes, dictated the first half of the fight

with his speed and his jab. After Holmes rallied in the sixth, seventh and eighth rounds, scoring effectively to the body, Harris appeared to have best of the final two rounds when he scored with jabs, quick left hooks and rights to the head.

“He really looked like he was 47,” Harris said.

George Colon scored it 96-95 for Holmes, and Harold Lederman favored Holmes 96-94. The third judge, Joe Dryer scored it for Harris 96-94, as I did.

“I knew as soon as they called it a split decision, I knew they were going to give it to Larry Holmes because he’s Larry Holmes and for what he’s done for boxing,” Harris said.

Most onlookers thought Holmes had done enough for boxing and that he should not fight again.

Holmes said he wanted one more fight, against George Foreman, 48 at the time, and then he would retire.

A fight against Foreman never happened, so Holmes hit the nostalgia trail. In something called “Legends of Boxing” heavyweight title fights, Holmes stopped old rivals James “Bonecrusher” Smith in the eighth round in 1999 and Mike Weaver in the sixth round in 2000. In 2002 he engaged in a “circus act” fight and won a ten-round decision over 334-pound Eric “Butterbean” Esch, who was billed as “King of the Four-Rounders.”

On Jan. 16, 2004, at Birmingham, Ala., 54-year-old Larry Holmes boxed Ron McCarthy. At least, it was only a three-round exhibition.