If you thought you knew all about boxing, you are about to be disabused. Just pick up a copy of the May issue of *Forbes* magazine – that's the one with Don King on the cover – when it hits the stands next week and you're bound to be embarrassed by the depth of your ignorance.

We'll bet you didn't know, for instance, that "currently five different punchers lay claim to five different World Heavyweight champion titles, and two other major titles are vacant."

Author Brett Pulley never makes clear exactly which seven sanctioning organizations he considers "major," but then he may have been so busy verbally fellating King that he never stopped to write them down.

Pulley's cover story is at once a paean to The World's Greatest Promoter and a lament for what he considers the sport's decline.

Like many another ill-informed chronicler, Pulley appears to think that the principal deficiency posed by the current heavyweight landscape is that Mike Tyson is no longer part of it:

"Boxing's biggest problem – and Don King's ready-made solution – lies in the fact that it hasn't found a flamboyant and dangerous new heavyweight champion since Mike Tyson went to prison (for the first time) in 1992," writes Pulley, conveniently ignoring the fact that when Tyson went to the sneezer in '92 he hadn't been the champion for over two years.

Pulley goes on to demonstrate a serious case of Tysonitis, noting that *"since Tyson's exit in 1997, after a disqualification for biting Evander Holyfield's ear, the sport has been better known for one-round letdowns, mismatches, bums and embarrassments."*

*Exit?*Exit from *what*, exactly? Tyson was the *challenger* in that fight. He'd already lost his title a year earlier when Holyfield knocked him out – and he had ten more fights
after
the 1997 ear-biting incident.

Here's Pulley's version of the origin of the King-Tyson relationship: "*In 1988 Tyson was the youngest heavyweight champion in history and one of the most fearsome fighters ever. But he was vulnerable: His manager, Jim Jacobs, had just died; his trainer and father figure, Cus D'Amato, had died three years before; and his marriage to actress Robin Givens was coming to a volatile end. King seized the moment, convincing Tyson he would make him richer and help fill the void in his life."*

Not a word, you'll notice, about Bill Cayton, the co-manager from whom King actually stole Tyson that year.

But then this Brett Pulley clearly comes to praise Don King, not to bury him. He writes, for

instance, that *"In 1979 King brought the fledgling HBO pay-TV channel its first heavyweight fight and three years later sold another bout to the network for $2 million, putting the now huge Time Warner outlet in the boxing business."*

This revelation is apt to come as a major surprise to the people at HBO, who for all these years have been laboring under the delusion that they put themselves in the boxing business with George Foreman-Joe Frazier in 1973, and that *that* was their first heavyweight title fight.

The King portrait is framed around last January's Zab Judah-Carlos Baldomir card in New York. Judah is described as "a Brooklyn-bred, gazellelike welterweight at less than 150 pounds." (As opposed, presumably, to those less-gazellelike welterweights who weigh *more* than 150 pounds.)

And from Pulley's account you'd think that night's defeat of Jean-Marc Mormeck by O'Neill Bell was an upset that made Buster Douglas-Tyson pale by comparison.

But what is most maddening about the Forbes story isn't Pulley's boxing ignorance, for which he can be forgiven, but his deliberate propensity for misleading distortion when it suits his purposes. He notes, for instance, that "The Garden has played host to some of the great fights in boxing's history, and even names some of them, but at no point in his story would the reader discover that King's Baldomir-Judah card took place in the 5,000-seat Madison Square Garden *Theatre*
and not in the 20,000-capacity main arena.

And he buttresses his point about the sorry state of contemporary boxing by noting that "Even a reality show on NBC –*'The Contender*,' hosted by Sugar Ray Leonard and Rocky actor Sylvester Stallone – didn't help; it got canceled after one season. By contrast, a reality series for Ultimate Fighting Championship, whose bare-knuckled, full-contact fights draw legions of young viewers, soon begins its third season on Viacom's Spike TV."

Which is, strictly speaking, true enough. We're no great fan of 'The Contender,' but the fact is that the show was picked up by ESPN for its second season and is now headed for a third. Does one season on NBC and two more on ESPN render that show an abject failure while a three-year run on Spike makes UFC an unqualified success?

Although *Forbes* is ostensibly a financial magazine, Pulley seems at his most befuddled when he's dealing with fiduciary matters. He seems utterly aghast, for instance, when he notes that *"Tyson grossed more than $400 million in his career but kept only 25%. During the years he was represented by King, he paid 30% to the promoter, 20% to two managers, and half of what was left to taxes."*

Except for the part about the two-headed manager, those figures aren't especially uncommon for a boxer in Tyson's tax bracket. The astonishing part is, or ought to be, what happened to the $100 million he *did* get?

And there's this baffling non-sequitur*: "Each sanctioning entity takes a 3% cut of the gross*

purse, and three or four can profit from a single fight when a title is being 'unified.'

Which is once again true, or would be if it ever happened. Off the top of my head I can recall exactly one fight in which all four major titles were involved – Bernard Hopkins-Oscar De La Hoya in 2004. And Don King wasn't the promoter of that one.

And in what appears to be an attempt at warts-and-all balance in his otherwise fawning portrait of the World's Greatest Promoter, Pulley concedes that *"in the early 1980s he got sued by Muhammad Ali, who accused King of shortchanging his purse from a fight against Larry Holmes. King settled for less than $100,000."*

Which is once again, sort of true, but doesn't begin to tell the whole story, in that it makes it sound like some civilized, out-of-court accord hammered out by the lawyers. What actually happened is that after Ali sued King for the $1,170,000 the promoter had shortchanged him for the Holmes fight, King arranged for a suitcase containing $50,000 in cash to be delivered to Ali. It was a forerunner of a similar ploy he would use years later in spiriting Hasim Rahman from beneath Cedric Kushner's nose: When Ali got a look at that much flash-cash, he obligingly signed a release absolving King from paying him the rest of what he owed from the Holmes purse.

When Ali's attorney learned what he had done, he reportedly burst into tears.

So what does Don King make of Pulley's brand of hard-hitting journalism? Well, the *Forbes* issue won't hit the stands until April 18, but the promoter's publicists are already e-mailing copies to anyone willing to sit still long enough to read it. Draw your own conclusions.