

Wanted: Next American Heavyweight Champ

Written by Rick Folstad
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Used to be the heavyweight champion of the world came from city slums, broken homes and hard times. He was the kid who thought he could fight his way out of poverty and addiction. At some point, he'd wander into some seedy boxing gym with his fists cocked and a cinder block on his shoulder. He'd find a friendly cop who'd take him under his wing. The cop would teach him how to box and make sure he stayed out of trouble. Six years later, with the rage still inside him, the kid would become heavyweight champ of the world.

He was from places like Louisville, New York and Brockton, Massachusetts.

Looking for the next American heavyweight champ? Avoid the inner-city. Snub the ghetto. Check your local college athletic director. Don't expect to see another Mike Tyson rise out of the rubble.

According to a press release, some TV types are looking in odd places for the next heavyweight champ, towns like Gainesville, Boulder, Madison and Athens.

"This year, in a groundbreaking TV series that will set the standard in reality sports programming, boxing will look to (the football) gridirons to find an 'American Champion,' to once again bring attention and prestige to the world heavyweight championship."

Only in Hollywood.

The release states they will start with "75 elite athletes from college football programs from around the country. These are athletes who have been team captains, All-American candidates and award winners who have fallen through the cracks when it came to being drafted into the NFL."

This is their second chance at turning pro. It's just in a different arena. With different rules. And different equipment. And different physical and emotional requirements. And different conditioning.

It's expected to air in late fall.

Do these football players have any idea what they're getting into? There's a difference between getting tackled and getting hit by a right hand. We've been there before with Ed "Too Tall" Jones and Mark Gastineau.

Scary stuff.

"You look at football, it's just like boxing," said trainer Floyd Mayweather Sr., who will be involved in their training. "It's a sport where you make contact. And these guys know what pain is about. That's a good thing."

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Sure it is.

Floyd has a good sales pitch. But pain and contact are where the similarities pretty much end. Soccer has pain and contact.

After the 75 are picked, the group will be whittled down to 30 after some physical and mental tests. From that group, six athletes will be chosen to “live and train together full-time at the American Champion sports facility.”

Isn't this show called The Contender?

No. The six won't fight each other. They'll just train together and go about their careers as though they were actually from the inner-city.

The idea is for the camera to capture the human drama and the physical pain that is all part of the fight game.

“Just like American Idol needs people with real talent, so does heavyweight boxing,” said American Champion producer Jason Williams. “Heavyweight boxing needs big, fast, smart, quick, dedicated, strong-willed guys, and American Champion is going to bring that star talent to the ring and the whole world of boxing.”

Former and current football players who want to attend an American Champion tryout camp can register at www.theamericanchampion.com.

Why not? Nothing else seems to be working.