When he is not hitting his opponents' with educated punches, Andre Ward is devising a plan to resurrect the sport of boxing. He's working off a knee injury, but time to check in with the TSS Marksman...

RM: Andre, how are things going? I heard about the knee injury, is everything ok?

AW: Well, I had an injury on my right knee playing basketball at the 24 Hour Fitness. I just use basketball as an outlet because I am normally in the boxing gym all the time. And when I am not in the gym I am on the road running the hills, that kind of thing. So I like to play basketball because it is in the same terrain. After my fight in the Cayman Islands, I spoke with my godfather Virgil (Hunter, Ward's trainer) and we agreed to take three or four weeks off. We had four hard working camps back to back. And really, after winning my Gold Medal in the Olympics, we didn't get a chance to take a lot of time off. So, we thought it was best. But, being who I am, I get anxious after a few days. So, I just started playing basketball again. And I was playing for an entire three weeks before I got injured. On the morning I got injured, I went a sports medicine place called Body Max, right here in Dublin (California.) It was funny because I felt like the guy was pushing me a little hard that day. But once we got started I didn't complain because I am naturally a hard worker. Honestly, I probably worked harder than I should have worked that morning and maybe weakened some stuff. I went home and got anxious to get out of the house, so I went to play basketball. I finally got out there, and played about four games. In the fifth game, I was on a fast break and I had one guy to beat. I kind of turned my body awkwardly and my foot got caught on the other guy's foot, and bam, I got hurt, and fell to the floor. I knew I was hurt. I knew it was something.

RM: You have to stay off of those courts, man.

AW: Yeah, I think I am done with basketball, that's for sure. The next day, I went to the doctor's and got an X-ray and an MRI. Then I spoke with my pastor, Napoleon Kaufman, the ex-Raider running back, and I spoke with this other ex-football player named Robert Jenkins, he played for the Rams and the Raiders, and they both recommended an arthroscopic surgeon named Warren King that works for the Raiders. Warren King sees knees all day long and has worked with the best of them so it made me feel comfortable. I took my MRI there, and we had the arthroscopic surgery. The procedure went well.

RM: How are you healing up?

AW: The procedure went well. I healed up pretty quick man, to be honest with you. The injury happened a few weeks ago. The first week was tough with all of the medication and things like that. I was kind of loopy for an entire week. I was just doing minor things like going down the stairs and going back up the stairs. Then week two, which was last week, I felt real good. I began to eliminate the crutches here and there. I am virtually off of the crutches right now. I am going to see Warren King Monday morning; hopefully I will be able to take this brace off. So I

am feeling good man, rehab is going good. I do my rehab with a guy name Donald Chu in Castro Valley. We are doing things with my upper body, and some slight leg work. So we are working man. We are not sitting around. We are not getting complacent.

RM: So you are saying that you haven't been discouraged from the ultimate goal?

AW: I am going to be honest with you Ray, it was rough. The day before I got hurt, we had pretty much solidified my next fight at the Oakland Coliseum for October 3rd. We were looking to fight Enrique Ornelas. He is a top ten guy. I really wanted that fight. And, I have wanted to fight in my hometown for a while. I demanded to my team that I wanted to fight at home and we finally made it happened. So, that part of this whole thing made it really, really, rough. I was really excited and a lot of people were pumped about my hometown fight. I love the Bay area and I love the fans here as a whole. I have been really hungry to put a fight in Oakland. So that part was rough. And secondly, I was on the verge of fighting for a world title. I broke into the top ten in the WBO and WBC, and I think I am ranked about twelve or thirteen in the WBA. So, I was knocking on the door. But it is a learning process. Right now, I feel good. I am encouraged. God puts things in front of you that you need to overcome. This just gives me a greater appreciation for what I do.

RM: Great! Let's change gears. Do you have any fear when you go into the ring?

AW: Well, I feel deep in my heart that I didn't choose boxing. I feel like God chose boxing for me. I know I have to work hard, and my preparation causes me to be confident. The last week before a fight, when we start to taper down, I don't care who I am fighting, I am ready to work. You know, I have left my home. I have left my family. I have made the investment, now I am ready to rumble. My dad used to have a saying when I was younger; he said, "If anybody is training harder than we are then they are over-training." I think that is still the same concept today. You see, my commitment makes me confident. But you always have butterflies. You need that to be on top of your game, it is normal. As far as fear goes, I don't think I truly have fear before a fight. I don't think so.

RM: What are your thoughts about the sport of boxing?

AW: To a degree, I feel I am going to be an ambassador to the sport. The first three or four years of my career I pretty much tried to get situated. At the same time, I have been learning the business end of things. You know, I am watching. I am looking. I am getting more comfortable with the game. The sport of boxing needs an ambassador. And I plan on being that. With that being said, I have confidence to know that God is with me.

RM: What do you mean by becoming an ambassador to boxing? What do you want to do for the sport?

AW: Well first of all, I obviously want to keep winning. But, from a business stand point, I see many things in the sport that upset me. For example, boxing is a sport that requires years of preparation. But if you lose one fight, your minimum is re-negotiated. Boxing doesn't even have a union. So, in a situation like mine, now that I am hurt, there is no money coming in. Now that I

am hurt, there is no guarantee like in the NBA, where they have a five year contract, and they get paid, win, lose, or draw. I mean, if Kobe Bryant or Lebron James, get hurt their pay doesn't change.

RM: That's true.

AW: Boxers, especially top boxers, cannot afford to have a bad day. If you make $150,000 on HBO and lose, then your next fight has to be on ESPN 2 making $15,000. I do not really understand who runs that part of the game. I am just noticing things lately. And, I feel like the sport does not get the respect it deserves. If you look at MMA, don't get me wrong, they are doing their thing, and I have a great deal of respect for those guys, but why are they able to get tons of sponsors? Each one of those guys has like five or six sponsors on their shorts. Those fighters get signed and they get endorsements. Why is that? Then they say boxing is too brutal. But MMA is more brutal than boxing. In boxing, we have a standing eight count, or other rules and regulations.

RM: Very true.

AW: People cannot say boxers are not getting endorsements because it is a brutal sport. I am sure that there are MMA fighters that disrespect their sport from time to time, just like boxers do. So, I kind of feel like boxing is getting swept under the rug. And, I do not feel like fighters are getting their just do. I think that we should get compensated a lot more for what we do as athletes on the pay scale level and sponsorship level. This sport will be resurrected. And I hope to be a voice for the sport of boxing as a whole.

RM: Well, like you said, if you really break it down, the MMA is a lot more organized. Most of the best fighters in the MMA do not get paid as much as the top fighters in boxing. But fighters in the MMA have a consistent income. Therefore, a loss wouldn't hurt them as much as a boxer. For example, Chuck Liddell lost two of his three fights in 2007 and he is still one of the most popular fighters in the UFC. But when Roy Jones lost those fights in 2004, the boxing world forgot about him. MMA is more organized and that is why they have an edge in popularity.

AW: It is a lot more organized and it has marketing. Uriah Faber the WEC fighter is a perfect example. I love that guy now. I remember watching a documentary about him the day before his fight in Sacramento. And if it was not for his documentary I would not know who he was. They did a great documentary on him the day before his fight, and it made me a fan. I watched his fight the next day and now I am a Faber fan and I don't even watch the WEC or MMA that much either. They also sold the place out. They sold Arco Arena out. You would be hard pressed to sell out a championship boxing fight anywhere in California. So, a big part of it is organization, but it is also the marketing.

RM: I guess you can say boxing does its own share of marketing with the HBO countdowns and what not.

AW: Well yeah, I mean, I appreciate a press conference here or a press conference there. But that is just for boxing fans and the boxing media. If you don't try to branch out to the mainstream

sports fans, you are not going to sell that many tickets, and there won't be any money.

RM: So, the fight game just does not make sense to you. Is that what you are saying?

AW: I just don't understand why only certain guys are making the money. Pacquiao is doing his thing, he is a draw. De la Hoya is a draw. But what about these other guys that are world champions who cannot even get compensated financially? From a business standpoint, I think it is time for fighters to get educated contractually. I am trying to educate myself because it is time for fighters to understand what the fight game is about. It is time that we rise up man. It is time for the fighters to work together. If one of us doesn't understand something, we should be able to ask "what does this mean?" I think it is time for the sport of boxing to resurrection. This is a brutal sport. You are taking a risk in that ring. When you leave the house there is no guarantee that you are coming back. Under those types of circumstances, fighters should be compensated. We should be able to set up a program, where if I get injured, and I do not fight for a year, I am fine. It is just a long process man and I do not claim that I know all the answers, but I am learning as I go. If I learn some information that can be beneficial for fighters, I just want to get it out there. It may not be popular, but, I am willing to step out and take the lead on this.

RM: That is good Andre, I think you have some valid points. It is about time somebody steps up and I think you are doing the right thing by speaking your mind. Let's change gears again. When we spoke in January of this year, about your future, you said "2008 was going to be a foundation year and 2009 is going to be the year that you make some real noise." Where do you see yourself at the end of next year?

AW: Well, things change you know. We have been really stepping it up these past three or four fights. We always knew the potential that I had. But now, people are starting to take notice. 2008 has been a satisfying year so far. I plan to be back by the end of this year, or the early next year. Whenever I comeback, let it be on God's timing. I am willing to live with that. It is what it is. You know, my knee is injured and I have to rest it so I am not going to rush things. Let it be what it is going to be. Right now, my main focus is just getting back as soon as possible.

RM: I was reading a story about you fighting Jermain Taylor soon, is there any truth to that?

AW: Well, the Jermain Taylor fight has not been brought to me but I am open to that. But, to be honest, I have my eye on every super middleweight, middleweight, and junior middleweight in the top twenty. That is just the way you got to do it. When I finally get my opponent, I just lock in on him. But I am open to fight anyone at the top of the division.

RM: You would go down to junior middleweight if you had to?

AW: Oh no, not me. The lowest I would go is at maybe a catch weight of 165 or 166. There is little chance that I would go lower than 168. I think that I will eventually move up in the future.

RM: So then you would be willing to fight a Jermain Taylor or any of the other top guys in your division?

AW: Well, with all of the humility that I could say it, I believe that I am a top fighter right now. Absolutely, within a couple of fights, I think I would be ready to fight any of them.

RM: OK last question, if you had a chance to fight anyone in history, who would it be and why?

AW: Man, that is a good question. I am not one of those guys that like to take it easy. I would love to fight Sugar Ray Robinson, Sugar Ray Leonard, or Tommy Hearns. I would love to see where I am at right now as a professional against them. Not to say that I am at their level right now by any means, but it would be great to see what I can do against them.

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