

## There Are Health Insurance Premiums To Be Paid

Written by Michael Woods

Tuesday, 18 August 2009 19:00

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Winning The Contender scripted reality show hasn't been an automatic catapult to mega-success, and all the trappings that go with it. For the season one winner, Sergio Mora, the Contender crown opened doors for him that quite possibly would have stayed shut had he not performed on such a platform, on NBC. Mora was given a title shot against Vernon Forrest in June 2008, won the contest, and then dropped the rematch to the late Viper. Other Contender winners haven't been able to make the show appearance translate into post-show fruition. Season three winner Sakio Bika has fought just three times since he beat Jaidon Codrington in a 2007 finale, while Troy Ross gloved up once since he beat Hino Ehikhamenor in the latest season's climactic match, which took place in February. And the path from the finale victory to the present for the second season champ, 38-year-old Grady Brewer (25-11, 14 KOs) of Lawton, Oklahoma, features abundant twists, turns and crap luck.

Brewer had hoped to stir up his career momentum with a win over Anthony Thompson in the main event at the Pala Casino in Pala, CA on Saturday, but luck, or fate, or the machinations of some devil entity that is pulling the strings on Brewers' athletic life instead threw him another in a long line of curveballs.

Thompson abruptly announced his retirement on Tuesday, so instead Brewer will face a fighter who he knows next to nothing about, Albert Onolonose (age 28; from Nigeria; 18-0, with 7 KOs). As far as curveballs go, this one had a pretty stark bite to it. But Brewer has contended with nastier ones. Consider: After beating Steve Forbes on Sept. 26, 2006 in the Contender climax in LA, Brewer found out he needed a new right knee, or at least an implantation of a considerable amount of bone, if he wanted to continue to box. Doctors told him he'd be out of action for two years whatever route he took, and in fact, after getting a piece of his shin bone inserted into his kneecap, he needed two years to let the implant take, and get back to near normal.

The process didn't grind Brewer down, for a couple of reasons. One, he took home half a million dollars for the Contender win. Convalescing while perusing the real estate section, looking for a nice new house for wife Brandi and his kids and picking up a new car and a boat isn't a deathly bummer. Plus, with the leftover dough as a cushion, Brewer didn't get too frustrated that his momentum would stall. Also, any man who has worked in a Goodyear factory, in the section where they cook rubber into tires, has to have a good capacity to stay cool mentally when pressures are mounting. Brewer worked 12 hour shifts the Lawton Goodyear plant, in 110 degree heat, for four years, til he went on Contender.

Before the knee crapped out on him, it was his shoulder which conspired against him. He had surgery on his left shoulder, for a torn tendon, a month before the five-week shoot on the Contender but being a stubborn sort with a considerable pain tolerance, Brewer ignored the doctor's advice to wait six weeks before engaging in any heavy physical labor.

Today, the knee is in solid shape, the shoulder feels strong, and the Goodyear plant, while still open, is firmly Option B for Brewer. Option A is the boxing thing, with a certain degree of

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contained urgency, because that Contender cash stash is almost all gone, and Brewer will need to pay his kids' health insurance coverage soon, because he parted ways with Goodyear. Contender pays for him, but he's responsible for his five offspring, ages 2, 9, two 16 year olds, and a 19-year-old.

"I enjoyed the money," he told TSS, "and it lasts, but it does run out."

Amen, brother. Brewer also invested some of the winnings, as he opened up a boxing gym in Lawton, which boasts 100 members and brings in about \$2,000 in profit per month.

The fight with Thompson was going to be a steppingstone affair. He held a TKO3 win over Thompson, in 2004, and figured that a win Saturday, and the IBO belt which he was confident of winning, would help him out in the IBF's ladder at 154. Cornelius Bundrage, another Contender alum, is at No. 2 in their rankings, behind champ Cory Spinks and "Vacant," so a boxoff with Bundrage would've made much sense, from a politics perspective. (Brewer beat pal Bundrage in Nov. 2008 in a decision snoozer which he'd like back.) Now, the less heralded IBC title will be up for grabs, and Brewer is left wondering why the script was re-written, and by who, and at whose request. But he'll try to take care of what he can take care of, which is his effort at Pala.

TSS talked to the fighter on Wednesday. "I think with the switch in opponents, something is going on, but I can't put my finger on it," he said. Brewer said that Thompson had been a fill-in for Russian Zaurbeck Baysangurov, who also pulled out, and so when he learned that he had yet another foe, he wasn't pleased. Briefly, he considered exiting, but since he trained so hard, he decided the show would go on. And no, he isn't trafficking in any conspiracy theories, wondering if all this went down to give Onolunose an easier time in getting a big name scalp onto his resume. "I don't think Onolunose is capable of beating me, but I'm not taking him lightly."

A ton of fighters got amped when the Contender concept was announced. They foresaw a shortcut route to marquee status and CEO paychecks; most have learned what Grady Brewer has experienced—there are no quick and painless shortcuts to the top in the most dangerous game.