

Mike Tyson Tells Oprah Why He Bit Evander Holyfield

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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Since turning pro in March of 1985 there have been a ton of tags used to describe former undisputed heavyweight champion Mike Tyson.

Here's another to add to the list: "truth-teller."

This past Monday afternoon Mike Tyson was on the Oprah Winfrey show to discuss the James Toback documentary that was released earlier this year titled "Tyson." During the show Mike was asked about all the well known ups and downs of his life in and out of the ring.

However, the question and answer I was struck by most came when Winfrey asked why he bit Evander Holyfield's ears during their second fight. Tyson's answer revealed what the true reason was for why he did it, although it wasn't a surprise to those who knew the reason all along. But it was refreshing to hear the truth come from his lips without any reservation.

Mike told Oprah that Holyfield head-butted him a lot during their first fight and was doing it again during the rematch. He said that was a part of why he bit him but it was more because he was "so pissed off that Holyfield was such a great fighter and wanted to desperately beat him." Tyson's words indicate just how deep it ran inside of him that he was in the ring fighting a guy who he couldn't beat straight up, man versus man.

After Tyson bit Holyfield's ears that June night back in 1997, he was given every excuse in the world by many who just couldn't accept Tyson could lose a fight if he was in shape and fighting with a sense of purpose and not looking past an opponent like he had Buster Douglas when he suffered his first loss. Most forget that Holyfield and Tyson came up during the same era and were on a collision course during the mid to late eighties. Evander, who weighed 177 in his pro-debut was cleaning out the cruiserweight division during the same time as Tyson, who weighed 214 for his pro debut, was going through the heavyweight division.

They were scheduled to fight in November of 1991 when Tyson injured his rib training and the bout had to be postponed. Shortly after that Tyson was convicted of rape and went to prison for three years. A year and a half after getting out of prison Tyson stopped Frank Bruno to win the WBC title and Bruce Seldon to gain the WBA title. Holyfield on the other hand had been stopped for the first time in his career by Riddick Bowe and looked awful winning against Bobby Czyz in his last two fights.

When Holyfield and Tyson signed to fight there was no demand for the fight because Holyfield was considered finished at the time. In fact Evander had to get medical clearance from the Mayo clinic before the fight could be sanctioned by the Nevada Athletic Commission because the prevailing thought was Tyson wouldn't just beat Holyfield, but might possibly injure him. To sell the first fight many cable companies across America offered a pay per-round package for those who purchased the fight so the fans wouldn't feel ripped off if the fight only lasted a couple rounds. When the fight turned out to be one of the better heavyweight fights of the

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decade won by the 12-1 underdog Holyfield, the rematch was made.

After Tyson lost the first fight he said he took Holyfield lightly and didn't realize Evander could still fight and promised to be in great shape mentally and physically for the rematch. This was a must win fight legacy-wise for Tyson due to the fact that it was the first time he was meeting a fighter a second time who beat him. Tyson took the fight seriously and weighed in at 218, four pounds lighter than he was for the first fight.

In the rematch Tyson came out strong and looked to get Holyfield out in the first two rounds. Mike knew just as Evander did that he is the most dangerous in the first two rounds and after that slowly winds down as his work-rate and effectiveness begin to erode. During the first two rounds Tyson emptied the wagon on Holyfield trying to put him away. Only there was a problem, not only was Holyfield standing up to Mike's best, he was fighting him back harder and winning the rounds. After Holyfield made it through and won the first two rounds, Tyson knew inside it was just a matter of time before he was stopped by Holyfield again, which no doubt caused him to panic.

It wasn't like Tyson was gonna get stronger and fight better as the fight progressed a la Marciano or Frazier. And if he didn't have the punch to keep Holyfield off while he's the most dangerous, how could he have kept Holyfield from coming at him and nailing him with hard right hands from outside while at the same time tying up his left-hook on the inside? He couldn't. And once Mike knew there was no way he could pull the fight out against a tough and determined fighter like Holyfield, who also knew how to fight him, he wanted out of the fight.

When the bell rang to start the third round Mike knew that it was going to be the last round of the fight. The only way to go about that was to get disqualified but at the same time maintain his persona as a tough guy. Being that he was so frustrated because he couldn't beat Holyfield straight up in a fair fight, he wanted to somehow hurt Evander physically and get out of the fight without getting stopped by him again. Tyson also knew some would view him as being a tough guy for biting Holyfield and acting as if it were a street fight instead of the form of quitting that it really was.

After Tyson was warned he would be disqualified and having a point deducted by referee Mills Lane in the third round for biting Holyfield's ear, Tyson bit Evander's other ear the very next time they were in a clinch. The fight was briefly stopped after that and once Lane saw Holyfield's ear bleeding from the second bite he DQ'd Tyson, thus ending the fight.

When Mike Tyson bit Evander Holyfield's ears twice during the third round of their rematch, Mike was in essence quitting and saying to Holyfield 'I know I can't beat you and you don't have to knock me out this time to beat me.' It wasn't a spur of the moment act on Tyson's part. No, it was thought out and calculated...and despite being suspended for a year by the Nevada commission, it fooled many boxing fans into thinking it was an act of toughness and a manly way of taking down a fighter who was beating you straight up and not because he was head-butting him.

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great fighter, he couldn't have been more honest. Due to Tyson's presence and intimidation factor he brought into the ring when he fought, he wasn't tested often by many fighters. When it finally happened and he was confronted by a fighter who could take his punch and had no fear of him, he came undone. Tyson admitting the truth has set him free in that it's easier for him to look himself in the mirror now. Forget about what others say and think, nothing is harder than attempting to lie and con yourself for years.

During the Winfrey interview Mike came across completely honest. If he was willing to admit the truth as to why he bit Holyfield's ears twice, it's pretty easy to believe everything else he said during the sitdown.

As a fighter Mike Tyson is one of the top-5 skilled heavyweights in boxing history. Had he possessed the character and courage of a Holyfield, Frazier or Arturo Gatti, he'd probably rank somewhere between fourth and seventh of all-time great heavyweights, but boxing is more than hand-speed and punching power. Therefore Tyson ranks somewhere around tenth and twelfth.

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