

Tyson Now A Gentler Figure, Wiser And (Mostly) Humbled

Written by Rick Folstad
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Sitting in front of TV cameras and facing a world still fascinated with him, former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson wasn't the tragedy we remember. There were no visible signs of the monster who threatened our children, bit off chunks of human flesh, went to prison for rape and was never more than a few wrong words away from going completely bonkers.

Tyson looked a little huskier than he did in his demolition days, but he's been away from the ring for several years now, and though his fighting days are gone, his appetite apparently isn't.

Appearing on the Oprah Winfrey Show last Friday, Tyson was there to meet with and shake the hand of former champ Evander Holyfield, who called the show after he saw Tyson make an earlier Winfrey appearance on Monday, Oct. 12, and talk about a life almost free of the inner rage that dominated him for so long.

On that first appearance on Oprah four days earlier, an emotional Tyson talked about his children ("I love my babies"), the mistakes he made, what his life was about.

"I'm afraid of fame because I know what fame can do to me," he said on Monday's show. "I'm apprehensive about fame. I'm very pragmatic. I've allowed myself to fall in a lot of pitfalls. I'm from that world where there are no boundaries. Anything goes."

Watching a film clip of himself as he got ready to enter the ring back in his fighting days, Tyson shook his head.

"That was my reality," he said. "I thought I was a god."

Asked about the recent death of his 4-year-old daughter, Exodus, who was accidentally strangled by a treadmill cord in May, Tyson struggled with his words.

"She was my angel," he said, his voice breaking. "I don't know (the circumstances of her death) and I don't want to know, because if I know, then somebody is going to be to blame for it and then there is going to be a problem."

Contrite and emotional without any signs of the rage that used to rule him, Tyson said he's "played bad movies in my head for the last time. That guy haunts me, that Mike Tyson guy, whoever the hell he was."

On Friday's show, before Holyfield came on stage, Winfrey asked Tyson how he stopped himself from going "into that dark place."

It was hard for Tyson to find an answer.

"I'm not a bad guy," he said, growing silent while he seemed to search for a better answer. "My

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first response is violence, and I did it so well.“

When Holyfield came onto the show, the two fighters cordially shook hands.

Asked about his feelings toward Tyson, who bit off a chunk of Holyfield's ear in their famous 1997 heavyweight title fight, Holyfield said he was very angry when it happened, but he wasn't angry very long.

“It was just part of life,” he said. “Everyone has to go through something. Things happen for a reason. The most important thing is to forgive, and I forgave him.“

When asked by Winfrey if he ever apologized to Holyfield, Tyson said he did after he felt pressure from his corner and his camp.

“I apologized to him, but I didn't feel the apology because I wasn't sincere,” he said. “I was more offended for apologizing because it was so insincere.”

Afterwards, he said he just wanted to sit down some place and talk to Holyfield, clear the air, maybe try to explain his behavior. But he says he never got the chance.

“Every time I saw him after that, he seemed leery of me,” Tyson said.

When Winfrey asked Tyson if he had something to say to Holyfield, Tyson turned and talked about how much he respected him and how beating him in the ring would have been like “conquering a giant.“ But the words “I'm sorry” never came up.

Holyfield said the main reason he wanted to come on the show was to let young people know how important it is to get along.

“If we can come together,” he said. “We know you can come together.“