

## The Fascinating Dynamic Between Evander Holyfield And Tyson

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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This past Friday Evander Holyfield and Mike Tyson appeared together on the Oprah Winfrey show. Tyson was Oprah's guest on Monday, October 12th and was there to talk about the recent documentary released earlier this year on his life, "Tyson." During the interview Winfrey asked Mike why he bit Evander Holyfield's ear twice during their rematch. Tyson answered saying that he was mad that Holyfield was head-butting him and was pissed because Holyfield was such a great fighter and he desperately wanted to beat him.

When Tyson was asked if he apologized to Evander afterward, he said he did but he didn't mean it and just did so to quiet the people around him who thought it was the politically correct thing to do. Tyson went on to say that he wished he and Holyfield could sit down and talk so he could sincerely apologize to Evander. Holyfield was watching the show and called Winfrey's producers and said he'd be willing to sit down and talk to Mike if he wanted.

"I wanted to tell the kids if we can come together, we know you can come together," Holyfield said. And that they did. When Evander was introduced he and Mike shook hands and embraced each other. Although Tyson said he was going to apologize but never really did, Evander said he forgave Mike a long time ago. In place of apologizing, Tyson spoke of his admiration for Holyfield saying, "I want the world to know that this is a beautiful guy, I just want you to know it's just been a pleasure.....being acquainted with you."

Mike Tyson and Evander Holyfield first crossed paths at the 1984 Olympic Trials. At that time Tyson was viewed as a terror and was having a hard time getting other amateurs to spar with him. Cus D'Amato, who knew a thing or two about subterfuge, played that out to it's maximum; he instructed his minions to spread the rumor that Mike was Sonny Liston's illegitimate son, which wasn't a terribly outlandish assertion being that Tyson was born in 1966 and Liston passed away in 1970.

The rumor only added to the Tyson legend. But light heavyweight Evander Holyfield was one of the few amateurs who had no qualms about getting into the ring and doing battle with Tyson. And according to most reports, (two coming from fighters who made the 1984 Olympic boxing team and were there, Meldrick Taylor and Tyrell Biggs) Tyson got the worst of it just as often as Holyfield did. And remember Tyson was 25 pounds heavier than Holyfield at that time. So Mike knew for a long time that Evander not only harbored no trepidation about fighting him, but always believed he could beat him if they ever fought.

Another thing came out during the Oprah Winfrey show, and that was how Tyson took notice how Evander took apart the heavily favored Ricky Womack twice to make the Olympic team. Prior to their box-off, Womack was viewed as a killer and Holyfield was thought of as being just a stepping stone. However, Evander beat Womack twice in 24 hours and that marked his arrival, which Tyson took note of. Most forget when Tyson and Holyfield met the first time there was no demand for the fight - even Don King tried to talk Mike out of it because Holyfield looked so terrible in his last two bouts versus Riddick Bowe and Bobby Czyz. Only Tyson was the

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driving force behind the fight and insisted King make it or he would. During the show Tyson said he viewed Holyfield as his biggest rival. In other words Holyfield was to Tyson what Joe Frazier was to Muhammad Ali and the fighter he'd most be measured against historically.

More than that Tyson felt it was safe to meet Holyfield now and thought it was the perfect time for them to get together since their 1991 scheduled fight was interrupted due to Tyson injuring his rib and then going to prison. In 1991 Holyfield was the champ and Tyson had no choice but to fight him if he wanted to regain the title he lost to Buster Douglas in 1990. Holyfield, like Frazier, wasn't the least bit intimidated by the superstar fighter of his generation and always believed he had the superstar's number. One of the biggest dynamics that was missed and didn't get much coverage during the Ali-Frazier trilogy was how much it bothered Ali that Frazier wasn't the least bit awed by his presence and reputation, something which drove Ali more to look for an angle possible to try to unravel Joe.

Although Ali couldn't get to Frazier, he never lost his confidence or questioned whether he was the greater fighter, as opposed to Tyson who hit Holyfield after the bell rang to end the first round of their first fight, and was dismayed when Holyfield practically climbed over the top of referee Mitch Halpern and clubbed him with a right hand to the head. At that moment Tyson got the message that just as it was in the amateurs, Holyfield had no fear of him whatsoever and showed up with the sole intention of winning the fight.

Holyfield, who turned pro five months before Tyson, always played second fiddle to Mike. Unfortunately that's still in play today mainly because Tyson's hand speed, accuracy and power made him more identifiable and thought of as a great fighter. But Evander has always been the tougher fighter mentally and never sat in awe of any fighter. Holyfield came back to win a lot of fights where things weren't going his way - Mike never did once in his career. Who can forget when Riddick Bowe had Evander all but out in the tenth round of their first fight and by the end of the round Bowe was hanging on and was looking for the bell to end the round.

What I'm about to say isn't going to go over well with some, but it's astonishing how it's said in some boxing circles that Holyfield never met the real Mike Tyson when they fought. Really? If that's so, why did Holyfield need medical clearance from the Mayo clinic before their first bout could be sanctioned? And if that's not such a big deal someone please pass along the last time a challenger needed medical clearance before he could fight the heavyweight champion because he was thought to be so unfit physically based on his two preceding fights? In addition to that Holyfield is four years older than Tyson and had a much tougher and less brilliantly managed career. If anything Tyson didn't fight the best Holyfield more-so than the opposite. Actually Evander resurrected his career off of his two stoppage wins over Tyson and only looked like the great fighter he was once after beating Tyson in their rematch. And that was in his next fight against Michael Moorer five months later.

Throughout his entire career Tyson was always given the benefit of the doubt for a loss or poor showing that other fighters never get. The score and result count more in combat sports than it does in any other sport because it's man vs. man. History says Holyfield is 2-0 versus Tyson and must rank as the greater fighter. If winning doesn't matter then why bother keeping score?

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Evander Holyfield is one of the toughest fighters mentally and emotionally in boxing history, and Mike Tyson will be the first to admit it. When they were sitting next to each other on the set of the Oprah Winfrey show, Mike sat there and grabbed Evander's wrist a few times in a sign of unity. Yet Evander never once tried to warm up to Mike, and that's because he's a harder and colder man and doesn't know what it's like to be in awe of another fighter. Mike Tyson seemed to need Holyfield's approval whereas Evander Holyfield doesn't need or seek the approval of any fighter. When Tyson looked at Holyfield it was if he thought to himself 'you are really a tough bastard and I respect that.' Whereas Evander came across suggesting you're another top fighter who I had to go through and beat, and I always knew I could. Although I'm sure some will just brush Mike's deportment as being nothing more than him having mellowed, because in their perfect world Tyson feared no fighter.

And for those who may think this opinion is reading tea-leaves, how many times did you watch Tyson before a fight and just know you saw fear in his opponents' eyes? Mike Tyson was an all-time great heavyweight champion, but Evander Holyfield was the tougher and greater fighter and must rank at least one slot above him. Due to their mental makeup Mike Tyson could never beat the best version of Evander Holyfield who fought as a heavyweight, something that came out in two fights when Holyfield was the fighter more on the decline, and it was rather obvious watching them interact as 43 and soon to be 47 year old men.

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