

Evander Holyfield Q n A-Part I

Written by Zhenyu Li
Monday, 19 April 2010 19:00

Father Time has been known as a merciless killer who diminishes the water supply to a fighters fountain of talent with every tick of hand. Yet, when it comes to the Real Deal, the edge of time has been only blunted.

The aging warrior Evander Holyfield (43-10-2, 28 KOs) proved himself to be the greatest ring legend ever in history at 47, in my opinion, by stopping a bigger and stronger veteran title holder - Francois White Buffalo Botha (47-5-3, 28 KOs) on April 10 in Las Vegas.

The fight was televised live in China by CCTV, the nations largest TV network, and millions watched the bout.

The well-preserved Holyfield finished Botha impressively for a 47-year-old, despite harsh criticism and sarcastic reports being aimed at the event, in the US and everywhere else, for that matter.

I also saw the aging warrior came close to winning his fifth recognized heavyweight world title when he courageously fought against the much-bigger Russian giant and WBA reigning champion Nicolai Valuev in 2008.

I give him credit for soldiering on, for still holding on to the dream, and still competing at a solid level.

I was privileged to sit down quietly with the four-time heavyweight champion of the world and talked for half an hour with no interruption during the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

Although this interview was conducted over a year ago, it spoke a mouthful for the newly-crowned WBF champion, and the material has never been published elsewhere, only on TheSweetScience.com.

Part I

Theres something special to be a man. I become the man who I am because I learned to work hard and not to quit. — Evander Holyfield

In the first episode of this interview, Holyfield talked with me about his seemingly endless reservoir of inspiration, his take on the pound for pound king Manny Pacquiao, his warrior mentality when facing tough oppositions like Mike Tyson, how he was influenced by the world-renowned Chinese Kung Fu master Bruce Lee and lots more.

Zhenyu Li: How are you, Evander?

Holyfield: Everything is just fine. Thank you, Bruce.

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Zhenyu Li: Alright, lets get started. Actually, Ive been watching and writing about you since 1996. Youve had an outstanding, illustrious career, winning the world heavyweight champion titles four times, becoming the first universally recognized world cruiserweight champion, dethroning the mighty Mike Tyson. Youve already gotten nothing to prove. At an advanced age, why do you still keep punching?

Holyfield: Well, you know, I got to say it based on my own experiences. Ill say it's because my story is to inspire people.

I came up poor. My mother only had a fourth-grade education. My dad didnt have any education at all. But they were very structured. They worked hard. You know, they didnt complain. They didnt murmur. And they believe in Christ. My mother taught me, you know, in believing in Christ, that you not be prejudice; you treat people the way they wanted to be treated; be honest, do a great work and not to quit.

My mother told me that theres something special to be a man. You got to work your whole life. When you work, youll find yourself always happy. My mother said, if you are busy, youll find yourself happy, youll find yourself accomplished.

In that theory, I see that it separates people. Some people try to work as less as possible, and they find themselves unhappy. People who work a lot find themselves always happier. You know, I became the man who I am because I learned to work and not to complain.

The difference between me and somebody else could be just that I work a lot harder than that guy, not because he comes as if it is a choice he makes. People who make the choice to study, work hard or do whatever they endeavor is to give it the max on themselves to reach to the top level. And you have the people who get envy and jealous, yet are not willing to put that work in, and they want to get the same praise.

Zhenyu Li: Youve put on a string of epic battles that would long be remembered, your trilogy with Riddick Bowe, your two fights against Lewis, your trilogy with John Ruiz. I saw that you were a man of will. Some say that you are loved because of your pure grit. You really experienced difficulties during those fights, but you weathered the storms. How did you make that happen? Whats your mentality at that time?

Holyfield: In a time when somebody does something that you do not expect, he kills you mentally. When a person hit you hard, bang, one or two shots, he wants to get you out of there, and you got to tell that man, nope! You have to get up and make the adjustment.

When you get hit, therell be a reaction of your body, and the first thing on your mind is that I am hurt, so what do we do? Recover, your hands come up, and it becomes a sight game.

A sight game is that I am hurt, but I am to make you believe I am not even hurt, and with this confidence appearing on my face, I dont panic, otherwise your opponent will know that you are hurt. Thats the whole art game in boxing. You gotta have the ability to properly show your emotions. If your opponent knows much about your thinking, hell control you. So the whole big

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thing is not to put yourself in a position where your opponent can control you.

The whole thing is about, can you concentrate, can you focus, can you handle the atmosphere, and not cut it out; its all this concentration thing that takes to be successful.

I am hurt, who knows it, but me, unless Ill let you know. If I let you know that I am hurt, youll hurt me a lot harder; if not, you gotta think I am not going to waste a lot of those energy. Like my fight with Mike Tyson, he hit really hard. He wanted to get me knocked out. You know, its a mind game, about concentration; its about your mind, of what it takes to win. I have to use what I have to the best of my ability.

Zhenyu Li: Talking about concentration and mind game, you know, Sugar Ray Leonard once commented about Bruce Lee, that he respected Bruce Lee, firstly because of his mental stability. Have you heard of Bruce Lee, the Chinese Kung Fu master?

Holyfield: Oh, of course, he was... he was pretty much the star, ALL poor people, at least, LOVE Bruce Lee.

Zhenyu Li: Have you seen any of his movies?

Holyfield: Oh, Enter the Dragon and all that, you know, thats our favorite, it was just so fascinating.

The main thing about Bruce Lee is that, he was a little guy. And you know, his quickness, his aggressiveness, his explosive power, you have to be a great athlete to have all these, his body, his look, you know, all these things have to do with discipline and structure. He was able to go against the biggest guy, regardless of who he was. He can do so because of his confidence; his confidence is bigger than the stature, the size of the person; he makes you believe that size doesnt make a difference; what really matters are the confidence and your ability to make adjustment.

It works not only for Kung Fu; that what is life is all about. Life is not about size, or the skin color, it is about how good and how well-prepared you are to pass the test. Bruce Lee showed this to us.

There were a lot of karate people, but Bruce Lee stood high above everybody.

Zhenyu Li: Speaking of Asian fighters, what is your impression about them?

Holyfield: You know what, Thailand has some good fighters. Theres a kid who is a champion now, Pacquiao (actually Pacquiao is from the Philippines). Oh, boy, he is big in America now. It thrills me that boxing has become what it is as a world sport. Once, you got world champions all from America, now you got them from all around the globe. You got some Russians, you got some Germans, you got one guy from Africa, and this Pacquiao. You got all these personalities coming in, and possibly, future champions from China. The sport is going global.

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Zhenyu Li: From your fighters perspective, what do you think are the reasons that Pacquiao stand far taller than the rest of the Asian pro boxers?

Holyfield: Well, you know, he has what is called determination.

Zhenyu Li: You just mentioned world champions from Russia, take Wladimir Klitschko for example, he is recognized as the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world, a position that you once took. But unlike you who always come forward, has an iron will and are difficult to be stopped, Klitschko won his matches all with a defensive, cautious style. He has never weathered a storm, like you. Some say that he has a glass chin. Why is such a big difference?

Holyfield: You know, what you believe is what you fight for. And what you believe is what you die for too. I die for what I believe. Some would say that this person is genetically better than another one. I dont think much of it. I think its all about what you believe and what youve been trained to do.

Check back for Part II.