

Tyson-Douglas: Every Fight Fan Remembers Where They Were 20 Years Later

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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On February 11th 1990, undisputed heavyweight champion Mike Tyson was just 23 years old and sported a record of 37-0 (33). He was the biggest draw in boxing since Muhammad Ali and some observers and historians even thought he was perhaps the equal to both Joe Louis and Ali as the all-time great fighters they were. I said some, not all.

By February of 1990 the young Tyson had completely cleaned out the heavyweight division and was nineteen months removed from scoring the signature win of his career: a 91 second first round knockout over former light heavyweight and heavyweight champ Michael Spinks. After beating Spinks, Tyson split with his head trainer Kevin Rooney who had replaced the deceased Cus D'Amato five years earlier. Mike had even married and divorced Robin Givens by early 1990 and was trying to rededicate himself to boxing. And Don King was in control of his career having finagled his way into Tyson's world shortly after his co-manager and confidant Jimmy Jacobs passed away from leukemia in 1988.

Mike arrived in Tokyo Japan a couple weeks before his February 11th title defense against James "Buster" Douglas. Training Tyson for the Douglas fight were Jay Bright and Aaron Snowell. Which at the time didn't seem to be such a catastrophe being that Tyson was a 42-1 favorite to beat Douglas, and quickly. Douglas was thought of as a fighter who always came up short in a big spot. He quit in the tenth round of his previous title shot versus Tony Tucker in 1987, he'd already been stopped twice and wasn't considered much of a puncher despite his 6'4 230 plus frame. Basically, Douglas was viewed as just another payday and tuneup for Tyson before he met the fighter who'd emerged as his biggest threat and next challenger, former undisputed cruiserweight champion, Evander Holyfield.

Roughly two weeks before the Tyson fight, Douglas's mother, Lula, passed away. Although there's been a lot of revisionist history since the fight, no one was saying prior to the fight that losing his mother before fighting Tyson would inspire Buster enough to beat Tyson. In fact what they were saying was he's the unluckiest guy in the world having to carry the burden of losing his mother and then having to fight Mike Tyson. But some needed to justify how it was possible that Tyson could lose to a fighter like Douglas or anyone else.

That said, Douglas trained like he never had before and weighed-in at a svelte 231 pounds. Tyson came in a couple pounds over his best weight at 220.5. As he made his way to the ring Douglas appeared nothing like the church mouse he was perceived as being and looked as if he wanted to fight. Tyson entered the ring exuding the confidence he always projected.

Douglas came right out at the bell to start the first round and cracked Tyson with a hard one-two jab-right combination that shot his head back. For the first seven rounds Douglas moved and boxed beautifully. His long reach and jab disrupted Tyson's aggression and whenever Mike seemed to try and think his way in, he was met with a hard straight right hand from Buster behind his stiff jab. Douglas was winning the fight looking like a complete fighter and timed Tyson perfectly with his right-uppercut as he stepped back after jabbing to lure Tyson into him.

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In the eighth round after having Tyson shook a few times and only being saved by the ropes from going down, Buster got a little careless. Having Tyson against the ropes and being in a pattern of Mike not retaliating, Buster made a big mistake and leaned towards Tyson with his chin exposed. There he was met by a perfectly placed right-uppercut that dropped Douglas towards the end of the round. As Douglas went down he punched the ring canvas as to signal his displeasure having left himself so wide open for Tyson's big uppercut. Douglas beat referee Octavio Meyran's count and made it through the round. However, there was some controversy regarding Meyran picking up the count late, but a fighter can use as much of the ref's count as he wishes as long as he doesn't count 10.

If Douglas was hurt in the eighth round he sure recovered quickly and resumed beating Tyson all over the ring in the ninth. By the tenth round Mike wasn't offering much return and was taking a bad beating as he tried to push the fight. With a little over a minute left in the round Douglas had Tyson aimlessly following him when he landed a left jab followed by a perfect right upper-cut to Tyson jaw followed by another flurry of lefts and rights as Tyson was going down.

Tyson was badly hurt and out of it as he looked for his mouthpiece that had been knocked onto the canvas. Mike couldn't beat the count and by the time he made it to his feet he was being steadied by referee Meyran. The fight was over, Tyson's era of invincibility was gone forever and Buster Douglas was the new undisputed heavyweight champion of the world!

Instead of giving Tyson a rematch that Don King tried to force him to do, Douglas broke his ties with King and went on to fight the man Tyson was scheduled to fight next, Evander Holyfield. Sadly for Douglas he thought he had conquered the world by beating Tyson and viewed Holyfield as an inferior fighter.

Lo and behold the right-uppercuts he used to demolish Tyson got him knocked out in the third round by Holyfield. Unfortunately, Douglas wasn't taught that uppercuts are great against a swarming fighter who's crouching in front of you and right there. But they are suicide when thrown against a taller and upright fighter who you have to reach for. And double the danger when you throw it as a leadoff punch as Douglas did.

On the night of February 11, 1990, an overwhelming majority of boxing fans remember where they were. Because that's the night the myth of Mike Tyson as being the greatest heavyweight champion in history was shattered forever.

After the Tyson fight, Douglas went right back to being the quitter he'd always been before, and Tyson happened to catch him on the one night that he wouldn't be denied.

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