

Check Out "Lights Out" Tonight On FX

Written by Michael Woods
Monday, 10 January 2011 23:05

Tonight, the FX channel unveils a new drama called "Lights Out," which focuses on a fighter named Patrick "Lights" Leary who finds it hard to navigate life after his fighting career comes to an end. He'd been at the top of the heap, the heavyweight champion, but at the behest of his wife, he exited the game after taking a hardcore beating. Getting out, and staying out of the fight game are two different things, and Leary, played by Holt McCallany finds himself pondering a return to the savage science after he learns his savings have been reduced to near nothing, and the IRS wants a cut of what little is left. He has a wife and kids to care for, all of whom are accustomed to a certain lifestyle, so we can be reasonably sure that "Lights," five years after he hung up the gloves and pursued a new chapter in his existence, will once again succumb to the lure of the lump sum payday.

I checked out a screening of the pilot, which you can see tonight at 10 PM, last week in NYC, and was left wanting to see how Leary's arc played out. He'd already compromised his ethics by taking a gig collecting dough for a local gangster, and the New Jersey resident comes off as a likeable rogue who the audience will not find it easy to dislike, even if his actions go over the line from naughty to felonious. This feat comes courtesy of the lead actor McCallany who has spent ample time in the ring, was kind enough to chat with TSS for about ten minutes after the screening finished. He touched on what made him jazzed about this project, which very nearly didn't see the light of day after the original pilot was scrapped, and basically a whole new cast save McCallany was brought in; a memorable evening with Teddy Atlas; and why he hopes he doesn't end up like some fighters who make it, and then squander their booty.

WOODS Q) Please flesh out your boxing "career." When did you start, how many fights did you have, when was your first fight, and what attracted you to the sport?

McCALLANY A) I became interested in the sport when my little brother won the Golden Gloves. I used to beat him up when we were kids and then I found it got a lot more difficult so I figured I better try to learn a little bit myself. I always wanted to fight in the amateurs but I didn't do it until last year. I fought at Gleason's Gym in the Masters Division of USA Boxing. I won a decision over a German heavyweight. I had Mark Breland in my corner, the greatest amateur fighter of all time. He helped me a lot, to stay calm, and just do what I trained for. It was a great night for me, because I had wanted to do it for so long.

Q) In your mind, what makes a person want to be a boxer? Is there a "darkness" in their head? Are they trying to prove something to themselves? Do they have a rage they need to dissipate?

A) I think it's about trying to find out what's inside yourself. How will you behave when you're under pressure? You know how you'd like to behave, but will you be able to do it? Will you be able to control yourself in there and make the right choices? That's what you're trying to find out.

Q) Can you flesh out the time spent with Teddy Atlas, who is a technical advisor to the show, share some of what you learned, and share an anecdote that stands out to you?

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A) I learned a lot from Teddy Atlas, it could almost fill a book, but if I had to pick the one most important thing it's this: those moments when you're under pressure and you're tempted to maybe doubt yourself are only that: moments. If you stay strong those moments eventually pass and you realize you did the right thing by not giving in, by not quitting. Otherwise you can spend your whole life regretting what you did in one "moment." I remember one time way back in 1995 when I was at Madison Square Garden with Willem Dafoe. Teddy was training Shannon Briggs at the time, and after the fight Teddy came and joined Willem and me at ringside. Some guy came up to Willem looking for an autograph and interrupted our conversation so Teddy told the guy to wait a minute and the guy said to Teddy "shut up scarface." Teddy took a swing and hit the guy immediately, but he was a little too far away to follow up. There were seats in Teddy's way, and he had to reach over. The guy was closer to me so I cracked him a few times with the right hand, and the police grabbed me and slapped cuffs on me. Mike Boorman who worked for Main Events at the time saw what happened and convinced the cops to let me go. He got a kick out of it and kept laughing and saying "maybe we should put you on an undercard Holt!" I remember as we left the Garden that night all these young guys who were boxing fans saw Teddy and me walking through the halls to the exit, they knew what had happened at ringside and they started chanting "Teddy... Teddy.... TEDDY ... TEDDY... TEDDY.. TEDDY!!!" They just followed us chanting Teddy's name. It was like that scene I later did in Fight Club (ED. NOTE: He played "The Mechanic" in the 1999 film) where we all chant... "His name is Robert Paulson... his name is Robert Paulson... his name is Robert Paulson..." That was the night I knew there has to be a movie made about Teddy, because he's a genuine working man's hero. I was so happy to have punched that guy. It made me part of it.

Q) Is boxing the perfect sporting analogy to life itself? If yes, why?

A) Boxing is a metaphor for life because you have triumphs and failures, ups and downs, things to overcome. You get tested in life, just like in the ring, and you find out the truth about yourself. Boxing is truth.

Q) As you get older, you're 46, do you find yourself more "forgiving" of fighters who "stick around too long," as I do?

A) I never held it against them. I understand why they need it. Sometimes it's the adulation, and the adrenaline, or just simple economics. I feel bad for the guys who squander what they've earned. Who forget what they sacrificed to get it. A lot of boxers do that, and so do a lot of actors. I hope I don't end up that way.

I can't pretend, I'm hoping the series gains traction. With the buzz of "The Fighter," and Manny Pacquiao's explosion into a transcendent icon, our red light district of a sport is having a quite respectable run. I'd like that, I selfishly admit, to continue; so TSS Universe, please tune in, and then offer a critique in the Forum.

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amayseng says:

im hoping for a good series here...

however, from watching the trailer it seems the character playing "lights" is uncoordinated, unathletic, and what, 46 years old...the boxing during the fight looked pretty fake, pretty bad, air punches and overly dramatic reactions to being hit...is it too much to ask for these actors to land some light body punches on each other or their gloves to show a bit of realism???

i am really hoping for a good boxing show here....

hopefully i can stomach the fights....

Editor Mike says:

Ouch. Hoping Holt doesn't log into the forum. I thought the action looked ok. We can't have them really whaling each other, or the show wouldn't get insurance!

Robert Curtis says:

Great photo. Larry Holmes is looking good.

Robert Curtis says:

Where are my comments going? They never seem to appear on the right thread.

admin says:

This one appeared on the right thread...what did you do differently this time RC?

Isaiah says:

61 year old Larry Holmes called Floyd Mayweather an A-Hole, scared and basically all kinds of putting him down. He joins the ranks of boxing men who call a chicken a chicken and know way more of what they're talking about being how much a part of boxing history they are especially compared to the little keyboard warriors who prop up Mayweather's undefeated record like it actually means something. Mr. Holmes had only good to say about Manny Pacquiao, because you know the old saying... game recognize game. REAL men call Floyd out on being the TERRIFIED JOKE that he is including but certainly not limited to... Larry Holmes, George Foreman, Evander Holyfield, Roy Jones Jr., James Toney and Marvin Hagler... Mayweather supporters include the likes of delusional Juan Manuel Marquez, (real warrior but SO jealous of Manny Pacquiao it is sick.), loud mouth Paulie Malignaggi and Juan Diaz. Just a hunch, but it looks like the Pacquiao supporters know a lot more of what they're talking about.

the Roast says:

It looks like Cooney may have a chance vs Holmes if they do the rematch soon.

Editor Mike says:

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I did a video for ESPN NY, I think I asked Gerry how he'd do against some of today's heavies...lemme get it and post it. For sure, George Foreman today could knock off some top 50 heavyweights.