

Boxing one option for Chazz Witherspoon

Written by Rick Folstad
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The college kid has a pretty big name to live up to, but maybe the legacy of former heavyweight champ "Terrible" Tim Witherspoon has been left in good hands.

Chazz Witherspoon started boxing a little over two years ago when he faced the fact that the NBA wasn't going to come knocking. A standout power forward at Paulsboro High School in New Jersey, Witherspoon looked at his options after high school and decided he wanted to stay close to home.

"The NBA wasn't in my future," said Witherspoon, 23, the second cousin of "Terrible" Tim. "I could have probably played basketball overseas, but I didn't want to go that far from home."

Besides, a 3.8 GPA can open as many college doors as a sweet jump shot. So Witherspoon accepted a full academic scholarship to attend St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, where he's majoring in pharmaceutical marketing. He'll graduate this spring.

But before that, he'd like to get a handful of wins under his belt. He's scheduled to make his pro debut Sunday at the D.C. Convention Center in Washington D.C., against a guy by the name of James Daniels of Laurel, MD, who has a record of 1-2.

"That means he'll have been through the ropes as a pro three more times than I have," said Chazz, an Olympic alternate at heavyweight and a 2004 national Golden Gloves champion, who cruised to the title with five knockouts.

Witherspoon's late start in the sport can be attributed to basketball. That's where his focus was through high school. But when his basketball days were over, he decided he needed to try something else.

"I decided to try boxing because that's what Tim did," said Witherspoon, who talks to his famous cousin about once a week. "Tim got me ready mentally for boxing. I think the sport requires more mental toughness than physical toughness, and I think it separates the men from the boys. Boxing is not for everybody.

There is nothing you can do to prepare for it (your first time), and people don't realize how much goes on in the ring. I used to run track in high school and I would run four miles every other day. But when I tried boxing for the first time, I got tired after the first round."

That was 32 amateur fights ago.

Against Daniels, Witherspoon will be facing a guy about his own height (6-foot-3) and about 10 or 15 pounds heavier than the 220 Witherspoon expects to weigh.

"I'd like to make a good career in boxing so I can market myself to pharmaceutical companies

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for endorsements," said Witherspoon, who has a brother, 21 and a baby sister, 19. "Hopefully, that will lead to a full-time position once I retire from boxing."

Polite and articulate, Witherspoon said when he's done with the fight game, he plans on stepping away and not looking back.

"When I'm done, I'll truly be done," he said. "I want to be able to speak to my grandchildren, and you have to look at both the upside and the downside of the sport. There is a lot of physical abuse."

Maybe the best thing going for Witherspoon is the knowledge that for him, boxing is a choice. With his degree, he has other ways to go if it doesn't work out the way he hopes it does.

"For me, boxing was one of my options," he said. "I was not forced to do this and I'm not forcing myself to do this. I'm very blessed and I recognize that."