The title sounds like a good kids’ suspense novel, but the only one getting suspended was me. Here’s how it went down, editor-in-chief Robert Ecksel shot out an email to the writers of TSS, asking if any were interested in interviewing either Toney or Peter for this weekend’s upcoming rematch between “Lights Out” and the “Nigerian Nightmare.” Easy enough I thought, so immediately I volunteered. I liked the feeling of identifying feelings I used to have going into fights with the current ones fighters may be going through, translating them into words and putting them back out to people that may have had that feeling themselves or wanted to feel that feeling of rushing adrenaline (or the sanguine malaise) that a fighter may feel going into a fight… unfortunately neither fighter wanted to indulge me and I was served a hefty serving of humility as my Christmas-New Years Eve din-din.

I reached out to Toney first because Toney I knew professionally/personally. When he played Joe Frazier in Michael Mann’s ALI, starring Will Smith, I won’t be shy in saying I made the connect to get him seen for the part... (Remember, ability without connection=no part.) That was years ago now though and time changes things—like phone numbers, for example. So I called up his promoter, Dan Goossen. I have known Dan for even longer as he was the manager of Michael Nunn when both of us were young contenders vying for the middleweight title. Upper/Mid-80’s… That seems an eternity ago, or so, to me… I remember looking at the Goossens on TV and thinking how distinctly different they looked from the boxing managers of the day... or any day for that matter. Dan himself reminded me of Peter Cetera, for those of you that knew the super-band Chicago… but they had the easygoing Beach Boy style and an LA tan on their healthy-handsome visages. You get the picture… But let’s get something straight: interviews are generally something most fighters NEVER want to do… Correction, interviews with pseudo-writers, writing for online boxing publications where you don’t get multiple pictures of yourself doling out knuckle sandwiches to the needy. It’s boring and boxing writers ask the same redundant thing… where were you born, why do you fight, what is it like to be hit, why do you want to fight him, what was your childhood like, what made you want to start fighting? But it’s not like Time magazine is going to ask something entirely different… “So Mr. Balboa, global warming is fact and I, in fact the world itself, think it pertinent, given your last fight, you give us your opinion of cold fusion and if it is even a relevant and optional energy source that will allow us to work in harmony with nature.” So needless to say, I had to come from a different angle… try to spice up the mundane.

I dreaded making that first call, then a quick thought came to mind, I have always found it beyond amusing when I hear the managers and promoters speak on behalf of their fighters like they were the ones actually doing the fighting; taking the blows (like Stoney, John Ruiz’s guy. “Yeah, when we get a hold of you…” you get my drift), so even though neither Dan Goossen (James Toney’s promoter) nor Ivaylo Gotzev (Samuel Peter’s manager) are guilty of that infraction, why not present this piece from that perspective? Don’t mind me, gotta keep it fresh.

First to bat was Dan Goossen, I told him of my idea… asked him to get in touch with his inner James Toney and answer questions as James. I asked him if he ever acted, making the

mistake of thinking everyone in LA… forget it. He did humor me though.

Is there anything about Peter that scares you in this fight? Nothing scared me going into the first fight. The way I handled him… going into this fight, you can imagine where I am being in the condition I am in now. There is no way he can withstand the continual assault I will put on him. Samuel is probably thinking, what is Toney gonna be like now that he is in better shape… he’s gotta be concerned… what’s he gonna do, how can he handle me now when he couldn’t handle me at 50%? I am gonna be bigger, faster, stronger… stronger than ever… my punches will be more accurate and more frequent.

You know about Peter’s abilities… was there something he was better at than you originally thought? Nothing about Sam Peter was better or worse, only something about JT that was better or worse… compared to my condition now, I was in bad shape then… I’m in better shape today…. He can’t overcome what I am gonna put on him.

What did you think when he hit you with the double punch thing? He did that out of frustration… he couldn’t hit me… That’s a sign of a man confused.

Did you ever think you had him hurt at any point? I did have him hurt in the 6th/7th round and Peter held on… I didn’t get the chance to press, but being in real shape now, I am going to be a tougher fighter.

If you win this fight… When I win the fight…

Who do you want to fight next, Valuev or Klitchsko? This is an elimination for the WBC title that Maskaev has… but it’s hard to pick any of those guys as having a long shelf life… they may have the style in that they are tall and stuff, but I would chop a seven-footer down as easy as a six-footer. Jan 6th is the next step into my world. It’s Lights Out!

I like it… I’d say Dan knows his fighter… “Dan, wait, while I have you on the phone, I have a couple questions for you… what’s up with James’ prior level of condition? That seems to be a reccurring issue ever since he was a heavyweight… how’s that changed for this one?” “Look Michael, it’s no secret James has the ability, but with all the injuries he was suffering, he had to put rehab to the forefront and the conditioning he needed… the conditioning of an elite athlete, went to the wayside. At times his weight was astronomical for a fight…. But he was able to win on his knowledge. Rahman said he was lucky to have a Toney that wasn’t in shape, but it was the injuries… He had torn his bicep and triceps as well as his Achilles… took fights like the Ruiz fight on short notice, the remnants of the substance the doctors had given him post-surgery weren’t completely flushed out of his system and that’s why James was stripped of his win… But again, this is a completely different James Toney. That’s behind, be ready for the new James Toney.

Now for Samuel Peter: Even though I had never met him I heard he was a man of few words, but maybe we would connect on a level that he shared with stablemates, my roots in Lagos, Nigeria only being a slight detour from Akwaibom, where he was born, may lead to intriguing conversation as well. I ran into a wall as thick as the man’s chest… Not even remotely

interested in conversation. After a few calls to my DKP connection, Teddy Singleton, I was at least able to get his manager Ivaylo Gotzev on the line. So on and so forth, a little less enthusiastically I basically made the same requests of him as I did of Dan Goosen.

Is there anything about Toney that scares you in this fight? Scare me? I don’t think he knows what I got this time around but I know what he’s got… all this talk about his new training methods, this Billy Blanks, it means nothing.

You know about Toney’s abilities, was there something he was even better at than you thought he would be? He is even slicker than he looks… a lot of people think he can be hit here and there, looking at him on the screen, but when you are in the ring it’s a different story… he has a very tough head to crack but I will this time.

What were you thinking going into the first fight? Basically I was thinking about pressuring him, but not enough. I didn’t put enough punches together… now I am going to throw more punches… more power to the body… and once that is done the head will die… this fight we focused on the skills and the conditioning… this is the best fight in the heavyweight division… and my 2nd chance to beat really him down.

How is this one going to be different? This time I want to go buy my Bentley so I want go in there and end it early.

Did you ever think you had him hurt at any point? I had him hurt… he held the ropes, but he’s a trickster and did what he had to, to survive.

Who in the heavyweight division do you want to fight the most after this fight? I want to fight for the heavyweight belt… WBC belt, I want it right away… Maskaev.

“Ivaylo, thanks for taking the time… if Samuel gets a moment please give him my number and have him call me, I’d appreciate it.” “No problem… sorry about this, he decided to go to the gym early. He’s working hard for this fight.” I tried to believe that one, but, I don’t know, maybe I’m just tainted by common sense. Yes, I believe he is working hard, but do I think he went to the gym early? If you believe that, then I got a bridge that connects Manhattan and Brooklyn I’d like to sell you… Ivaylo, before you go, a question, how long have you been with Sam? “Since the Olympics… I saw him, I saw raw potential and talent… you can’t forget that this is a guy with less than 20 amateur fights and only 30 pro fights. That is 50 fights total and he is rated top in the world, so he is learning on the job… This is a heavyweight that can throw 20-30 punch combinations! You are not going to believe how much better he is in this fight from the last.”

The men behind the fighters know their fighters and can talk their talk come September 6th on Showtime… We’ll see if their fighters can walk their talk.