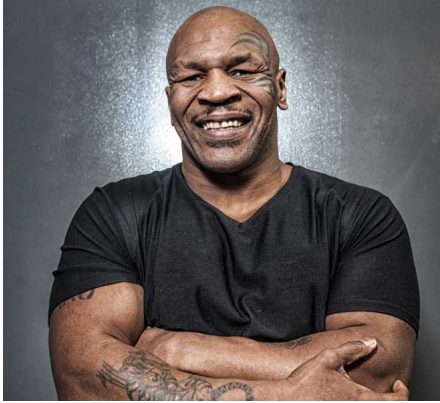


TYSON LIVING THIRD ACT OF AN AMERICAN LIFE

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Thursday, 20 February 2014 10:20



There are no second acts in American lives.

---F. Scott Fitzgerald, author of "The Last Tycoon"

Fitzgerald, just 44 when he died of a heart attack in 1940, might have been thinking of himself when he came up with one of his more memorable lines, ostensibly about U.S. citizens who have risen to great heights, only to tumble into an abyss from which there is no escape or redemption. But Fitzgerald, better known for his masterwork, *The Great Gatsby*, was wrong. There are many Americans who have gone on to live very public second acts, not all of them as successful as the first, and some who have even staged third and fourth acts which command widespread interest.

At first glance, two-time former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson, now 47, would appear to be in Act 3 of a roller-coaster life, even though he suggests the actual number is low. "I had 10!" Tyson in 2009 told a *Sports Illustrated* reporter who also brought up the Fitzgerald quote. But for purposes of brevity here, better to compress the many phases of Michael Gerard Tyson into a more easily digestible three-part evolutionary cycle.

The first act with which everyone is familiar is that of a seemingly invincible destroyer in the ring, a remorseless battering ram who made a habit of sending opponents into spasms of fear before he sent them crashing to the canvas.

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“I’ll break Spinks. I’ll break them all,” that Tyson said prior to his June 27, 1988, first-round knockout of Michael Spinks in Atlantic City’s Boardwalk Hall. “When I fight someone, I want to break his will. I want to take his manhood. I want to rip out his heart and show it to him.”

The second spotlighted incarnation saw Tyson stripped of much of his earlier aura of unbridled power. He came to know defeat, inside and outside the ropes. His \$300 million fortune not only vanished, but was transformed into a \$38 million debt, in part from leeching hangers-on and in part because of his profligate lifestyle. His deepening unhappiness caused him to lapse into a hazy fog of drugs and alcohol. He twice was incarcerated during his career as an active fighter, most notably on a rape conviction that he has always insisted was a miscarriage of justice brought about mostly by his increasingly unsavory reputation. Oh, and he was involved in perhaps the most notorious incident in boxing history, when he was disqualified by referee Mills Lane after chewing off part of Evander Holyfield’s right ear in their second fight.

“I wanted to kill him, bite him,” Tyson said in a Playboy interview during his Nevada State Athletic Commission-mandated suspension that was the “Bite Fight’s” byproduct. “I snapped. I was an undisciplined soldier. I wanted to hurt him. I never thought about what I was doing.”

And now?

In human terms, the current Tyson is neither destroyer nor destroyed. He is not quite as famous as when he was when he was knocking opponents stiff, and certainly not as rich, but he seems to have found the inner peace that always was more elusive for him to attain than the spectacular knockouts, the available women, the mansions, the fancy rides and piles of cash. He is the president and show pony of a relatively new boxing promotional company, Iron Mike Productions, and the star of a one-man stage show, Undisputed Truth, in which he lays bare for audiences the circuitous path he followed to glory, then to hell and back. He cites the highs and the lows of his personal journey in unsparing, often profane detail, and the effect on audiences is that, well, maybe there really is more to the guy than the one-dimensional pugilistic idol of Act 1 or the similarly shallow villain of Act 2.

Americans have always been suckers for comeback stories, which might be why this latest revision of Tyson’s continually shifting tale is noticeably upbeat. He – more so than the fighters who have signed with his fledgling company – is the reason for those relatively pricey \$200

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ringside tickets for Saturday night's seven-bout card at the Sands Event Center in Bethlehem, Pa., which he will attend. (He also will give a performance of Undisputed Truth in the same arena on Thursday night.) Maybe that's because it's been a long time, too long, since the snarling beast from the gritty Brownsville section of Brooklyn, N.Y., was the centerpiece of the last golden era of American heavyweight boxing, along with Holyfield, Spinks, Riddick Bowe and a resurrected George Foreman. Even somewhat lesser lights from that time frame, Ray Mercer and Tommy Morrison, tower above what now passes for the best of the U.S. big men in an era dominated by the Klitschko brothers and a host of other Eastern Europeans. It takes a vivid imagination to even dare to compare, say, Deontay Wilder and Bryant Jennings to the Tyson that used to be.

"Boxing is entertainment," Tyson the promoter said of his first serious return to the sport that made him famous since his then-38-year-old self, out of shape and clearly disinterested, quit on his stool after six rounds against lumbering Irish journeyman Kevin McBride on June 11, 2005, in Washington, D.C. "People want to see exciting fights. I gave them exciting fights."

Well, he did that and very well for a long time, although probably not as long as he might have had his passion for boxing remained on high flame. "I was a young guy on the rise," he sighed, "but I rose too fast. Life was coming at me too fast."

What happens when confused young people with a singular talent are suddenly thrust into a lifestyle of the rich, famous and decadent is that they find themselves with everything they thought they ever wanted, and emotionally with nothing. The wise heads and anchors of Tyson's early years as boxing's hottest attraction, trainer Cus D'Amato and co-manager Jimmy Jacobs, died before they could finish imparting whatever knowledge he would need to cope with his newfound fame and wealth. Tyson's marriage to actress Robin Givens quickly became grist for gossip columns, and ended in lurid failure, with Givens going on television to accuse her husband of schizophrenia and slapping her around.

From there on, it probably was only a matter of time before the tightly wound kid from Brownsville's mean streets unraveled, although his intimidating demeanor and crushing power enabled him to linger at or near the top until the remnants of what he had been were exposed by Buster Douglas, Holyfield, Lennox Lewis and even the improbable likes of Danny Williams and McBride.

Whereupon Tyson slid into Act 2, a long descent into darkness and despair. His fighting weight,

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around 217 pounds at his peak, ballooned to an unhealthy 330 and he was doing copious amounts of cocaine to boot. He had become a sad caricature of himself, and he knew it. But he had not hit bottom just yet. That would take the kind of tragedy that would send him totally over the edge, or finally make him take stock in himself and glove up for his hardest fight, the one with the inner demons to whom he had for so long surrendered.

His lowest point, Tyson said, was when his 4-year-old daughter, Exodus, somehow got a cord from an exercise machine wrapped around her neck and was suffocated nearly to the point of death. Tyson, who was no longer with the child's mother, received the call from Phoenix police on May 26, 2009. She died the next day.

A devastated Tyson did not careen over the edge and into oblivion. With the support of his third wife, Lakiha – you can call her Kiki – he took off 110 pounds, quit the dusk-to-dawn nightclub scene and dedicated himself to becoming the kind of husband and father he had always admired, but could never bring himself to emulate. Well-received roles in The Hangover movies and the stage play followed as Act 3 hinted at a happy ending, or at least a happier one.

“Absolutely,” he said when asked if acting out his life story, the good and the bad, before live audiences had resulted in a stage fright he had seldom experienced in boxing. “I had to put in a lot of preparation to do this. It is sort of like fighting, but harder. But somehow it just clicked.”

So, too, did his reintroduction to boxing, which came in the form of an offer from Garry Jonas, the chief executive officer of Acquinity Sports, which was formed in 2010 in Deerfield Beach, Fla. Jonas invited Tyson to become his partner, and the company was renamed Iron Mike Productions in 2013. IMP staged its first fight card on Aug. 23 of that year at the Turning Stone Casino Resort in Verona, N.Y., which served as a reminder to Tyson that what he had enjoyed of boxing was still there for him to enjoy again, if only he could put aside all the negative memories of real and perceived betrayals.

“I had just mentally given up,” he said of those lost years. “I was not interested at all in boxing for a very long time. But my partner, Garry Jonas, is a shrewd businessman who gave me an offer I couldn't refuse. I said to myself, `Let's go with this and see what happens.’”

There is no irrefutable proof that Iron Mike Productions will grow and prosper, or disappear.

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Great fighters have a hit-and-miss history when it comes to trying their hand at the promotional side of it. Oh, sure, Oscar De La Hoya transitioned easily, with the aid of CEO Richard Schaefer, into one of boxing's power brokers with the hugely successful Golden Boy Promotions. But Sugar Ray Leonard's foray with Sugar Ray Leonard Boxing fizzled, in no small part because of differences with his partner, Bjorn Rebney.

The future of Iron Mike Productions might well depend on how well its titular head and the "shrewd businessman," Jonas, continue to mesh. That could be problematical, given the various trainers and support personnel Tyson jettisoned or added during his own tumultuous ring career, but for now things appear to be going smoothly.

"We've already surpassed everybody's expectations of us as promoters," Tyson said. "The thing is, I'm not monopolizing nobody. I'll work with other promoters to make good fights. I welcome everybody with open arms.

"What we want to do is to stage a fight card every month. Hopefully, we can get associated with a big television network like Fox. We're in negotiations with them now. We want to make boxing big again."

Tyson's clashes with his own promoters, most notably Don King, whom he sued for \$10 million, are well-documented. He said his experiences will dictate how he treats the 16 fighters currently in IMP's stable. "The first thing I tell them is to get a great lawyer," Tyson said. "You never want to be too trusting in this business. Everything we do at Iron Mike Productions is on the record, on the table. That's the way it needs to be."

The 10-round featherweight main event on Friday pits IMP's Claudio "The Matrix" Marrero (14-1, 11 KOs) against Jose Angel Beranza (36-28-2, 28 KOs), while the 10-round bantamweight co-feature pairs IMP's Juan Carlos Payano (14-0, 8 KOs) against German Meraz (46-29-1, 25 KOs). But the most attention – other than that lavished upon Tyson, of course – features brilliant welterweight prospect Erickson Lubin (3-0, 3 KOs) in a four-rounder against Tirobio Ball (4-1-1, 1 KO). Everyone, Tyson included, seems to believe Lubin has a chance to develop into something special.

"He can go all the way to the top," Tyson said of the 18-year-old Lubin, who had been seen as

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possibly the United States' best chance for a gold medal in boxing at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics before he decided to go pro with IMP. "We just need to get him more experience, have him fight guys who can take a punch and make him go more rounds. But there's something there, definitely."

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kidcanvas says:

i hate to tell him but the 3rd act is sh*t