

Tommy Z Hunting For Boxing Success, And Still, A New Nickname

Written by Rick Folstad
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Two quick knockouts into his pro career and we're still calling him Tommy Z.

We've got to find this guy a nickname.

He can't be hanging around the fight game calling himself Tommy Z. That's not a nickname, it's a reprimand, something his fourth-grade teacher might have called him when she caught him talking in class.

"Tommy Z, do you want to share that story with the entire class?"

His real name is Tommy Zbikowski, which explains the Tommy Z. It's an easy way out.

But Tommy Z doesn't really roll over the tongue like "Madcap Maxie" Baer, or the "Manassa Mauler," or "Iron" Mike Tyson. Those are nicknames that stick with you long after you've heard the final bell.

Another thing about the nickname is that it doesn't send chills down your back or make the hairs on your arms stand up. It doesn't hush the crowd.

Tommy Z makes me think of the guy who delivers your pizza or bags your groceries. He's a nice guy who always comes in last when it comes to girls, sports and cars.

If Zbikowski was a gangster, it'd be different. Tommy Z would be a great name for a guy in a three-piece suit who wears a fedora, has a scar on his cheek and carries a machine gun (Tommy gun?) under his overcoat.

"Hey, boss. We gotta do somethin' about that stoolie on Pier 4. Should we have Tommy Z take care of him?"

Now that works.

But this is the fight game and you got to have a nickname that fits you well, that feels as warm and comfortable as grandma's hug, but is as tough as lighting a wet stogie in the rain.

Zbikowski is a former Notre Dame football player who fought in the Chicago Golden Gloves a

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few years ago and did pretty well, reaching the finals before being forced to pull out because of a family emergency. They list his amateur record at 75-15.

He later turned pro, winning his professional debut in Madison Square Garden on June 10, 2006 when he knocked out some guy named Robert Bell in just 49 seconds. I saw the clip. Zbikowski can fight.

But then the NFL got in the way when Tommy Z was drafted by the Baltimore Ravens in the third round of the 2008 NFL draft.

Playing safety in the NFL, his fight career was put on indefinite hold. But then they went and had this Collective Bargaining Agreement problem and Tommy Z, staring at a lockout and realizing there will be no more checks in the mail, decided it might be easier to go back to fighting for an income instead of selling tires at Wal-Mart.

So they booked a fight for Tommy Z on the undercard of last Saturday night's Miguel Cotto vs. Ricardo Mayorga title fight at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, and Tommy Z did what he was expected to do. He stopped some poor guy named Richard Bryant at the 1:45 mark of the first round.

That's a pretty good night for an NFL player, but what is even better is, he stopped Bryant with a body shot. There's something about that you've got to like.

It was about 30 seconds after Bryant quit wheezing and was helped out of the ring that they offered Tommy Z a fight on March 26 at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City. They haven't come up with any opponent yet, but he's fighting for Top Rank, so they'll get someone. They always do.

In the meantime, we've got to find this guy a nickname. Asked if he was going to change his old nickname, Zbikowski said he's always gone by that name, but if his new boxing gig starts to take off, he's going to want to find something else. Something a little more, say, intimidating?

"When I start boxing full-time, I'll get a real nickname," said Zbikowski. "I'm waiting for a boxing writer to just give me a nickname for boxing because I've never had one and I've always looked forward to having one. I can't be a self-proclaimed whatever. So I'm just waiting for a nice nickname to stick."

His nickname should be something simple and catchy but not too flashy, something he wouldn't mind hearing as he climbs through the ropes into the ring. It should have something to do with sending guys to La La Land.

Maybe some of these will inspire someone to come up with a name: Chris "Rapid Fire" Byrd; James "Lights Out" Toney; Jack "The Boston Gob" Sharkey; Billy "The St. Paul Thunderbolt" Miske; Jameel "Big Time" McCline; Gene "The Fighting Marine" Tunney; Evander "The Real Deal" Holyfield; "Two Ton" Tony Galento.

Some guys even have two nicknames, like "Fast Fres," or "Big O" Oquendo.

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Still, not much there he can use.

Maybe we could capitalize on his college football career and call him the “All-American.” We could sure use the publicity.

“I’ve played in an AFC championship game and in Notre Dame Stadium,” Tommy Z told the Baltimore Sun recently. “I’ve fought in Madison Square Garden and the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. I would like someone to beat that.”

Maybe we should just call him “Lucky.”

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