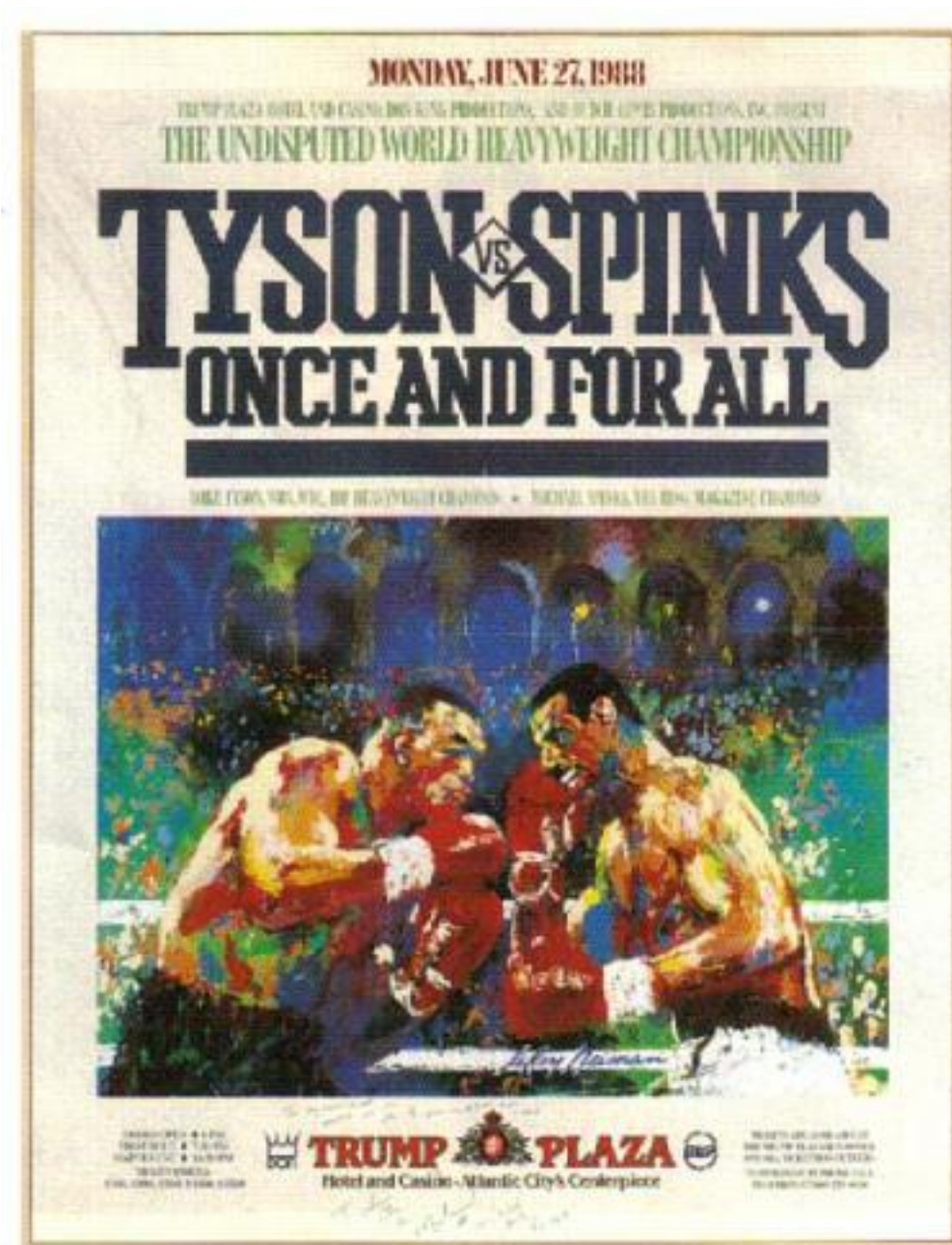


Mike Tyson Taught Me How to Do Math

Written by Raymond Markarian
Friday, 10 June 2011 14:17



My first boxing memory:

Mike Tyson taught me how to do math in the summer 1988. I was six years old running with a group of my friends past a packed drive way of cars, screaming, "91 seconds, 91 seconds, 91 seconds," for the entire street to hear us. It was a summer night in Modesto, California; the moon had not yet overtaken the sun. None of us could have been over the age of ten. But we knew what we just saw. Call it a child's intuition, the fight was big, we could feel it.

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There was an indescribable passion in the packed, small living room where I sat with my dad and his friends to watch Mike Tyson fight Michael Spinks. The dads welcomed me and the rest of the kids like men. They allowed us to watch the fight as long as we stayed quiet. It was cool. We felt like rebels. I remember the smell of beer and hard liquor, salsa and nacho cheese Doritos, grown men were talking boxing, and blaring battle cries, cursing loudly with venomous insults towards the undefeated Michael Spinks. According to my calculations, these older guys didn't know boxing like you and I do today. They were just fight fans. They knew of Mike Tyson but probably did not study the way he set up his combinations and used the elbow as a part of his punches.

And my father is nowhere close to being a sports fan. He actually despises physical fitness. So, I don't know why we were watching a boxing fight on that day. Yet, at the moment, Mike Tyson was a gladiator to every adult in the room. He was indestructible. To them Michael Spinks was just another opponent. And they were waiting for the moment Mike Tyson knocked the other guy out. From the way that they reacted I could sense that the 91 second finish came unexpectedly. What a feeling it was to watch these older guys jump and yell with their hands pointed to the sky signifying victory. It made me smile. It still makes me smile. In my eyes, my dad and his friends saw Mike Tyson as a superhero.

Mike Tyson helped me put it together, 91 seconds equals a minute and a half. It is just about as long it will take most of you to read this column, just about as long as it takes for me to brush my teeth, he knocked Michael Spinks out in 91 seconds.

I was so young, I didn't understand an undisputed heavyweight championship fight but I knew Tyson won. I was in the moment. If Mystic River was a feel good story they would write that book about what Mike Tyson's victory over Michael Spinks meant to me. It forever implanted my outlook on sports.

Sports memories for me start with Mike Tyson. Now, so many years later, and as strange as it may sound, 91 seconds has never meant one minute and thirty-one seconds to me, it means Mike Tyson.

Hearing someone say "a minute and a half" has me stuck in rewind. It reminds me of why I love boxing, when I didn't care about the politics that surround every fight, the big money contracts, the bad decisions, and horrible mismatches. 91 seconds made me feel like there is no such thing as an unexciting fight. 91 seconds is boxing magic, the 1980's version of Joe Louis' knockout of Max Schmeling.

It means Mike Tyson walking slowly to the ring surrounded by a horde of cops and security guards. It means Muhammad Ali wearing glasses getting introduced in front of a joyous crowd, Donald Trump, Butch Lewis wearing a cool white suit, my first experience hearing Michael Buffer's commanding voice, Jim Lampley, Larry Merchant, watching Spinks' head slams to the canvas, his water filled eyes, referee Frank Cappuccino's ten count echoing, Spinks climbing to one knee, trying to stand up, but falling into the ropes, the fight is over. Tyson turning his back with his arms wide open, his trainer Kevin Rooney jumps in the ring, I look at the grown men embrace in the living room, and then run outside screaming "91 seconds, 91 seconds, 91 seconds!"

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I was never good at math but Mike Tyson showed me how to make 91 seconds last forever. Enjoy your time in the Boxing Hall of Fame Iron Mike, thank you for making me a boxing fan.

Mike Tyson gets inducted into the Boxing Hall of Fame this Sunday, June 12th in Canastota, NY.

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Radam G says:

Nice! Da Iron, no-neck Mike put it on my boy, "Slim," in those 91-flicking seconds. Just imagine if MT woulda, shoulda, coulda stayed with the only trainer -- Kevin Rooney -- made for him. Da Iron dude woulda, shoulda, coulda been at the top of best to ever put on boxing mitts. MT missed a great appointment with history by jumpin' ship off from a kick-arse carrier to a rowboat of hired dimwitted hoodlums, who didn't know JACK about boksing. Holla!

the Roast says:

Good story. I have some fond memories as a kid watching some big fights with my dad and his friends. Holmes-Cooney comes to mind. I was so happy when Holmes won I was jumping around and my dad's buddies were all pissed!

Radam G says:

WTF! The Roast is puttin' it on me. Yup! Larry "So Contrary," Holmes put it on my boy Gerry Cooney too; I must admit. But I didn't like dat s***! Danggit! Dat sucka Holmes had the numbers for the Irishes. He broke my grade-school heart when he whup up on Irish GOAT Ali. Ain't life such a bytch and then come the dirt nap. Holla!