Last January, twenty-nine-year-old heavyweight Maurice Byarm (13-1-1, 9 KOs) was thrust into the spotlight.

When established contender Eddie Chambers pulled out of his scheduled contest against Sergei Liakhovich just days before the inaugural NBC Sports Network's Fight Night series, promoter Kathy Duva and matchmaker J. Russell Peltz were left scrambling for replacements.

Not only did they need to find two fighters willing to risk their reputations by fighting on television on short notice, they also had to find two guys that would put on a good enough show for NBC to keep boxing on the programming list for the foreseeable future.

Duva and Peltz hit the ball out of the park by matching the then-undefeated Maurice Byarm against fellow up-and-comer Bryant Jennings.The two fought a spirited contest, made even more impressive by the fact that it involved two of something the boxing public had perhaps begun to doubt the existence of: American heavyweight contenders.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Bryant Jennings took home the hard-earned decision win over Byarm along with an even brighter future as a contender. Duva and Peltz, along with NBC, were able to kick off their new

boxing show with critical acclaim. Just recently, NBC renewed its contract with Duva's Main Events (who will work with other promoters) for up to sixteen more shows on both NBC Sports as well as NBC itself.

Even Byarm has come out ahead in the deal. Instead of being mired in local shows or buried on untelevised undercards for the foreseeable future, Maurice Byarm is scheduled to appear this Friday on ESPN's Friday Night Fights, where he will have another chance against a young, undefeated heavyweight contender, Magomed Abdusalamov (14-0, 14 KOs).

"I thank God that I'm blessed to get two chances like this," Byarm tells me. "Nowadays, it's usually one and done."

He's right. Boxing isn't kind to fighters who don't pad their resumes with cupcakes and has beens on the way up. Say all you want about wanting competitive match-ups, an early loss for a fighter can be the kiss of death in today's boxing world and promoters know it.

"My fighting ability got me the second chance," he tells me. "I'm not too much of a runner. I don't back down. People pay money to see people fight, and I come to fight."

We need more boxers who think like that.

Byarm is the kind of guy who believes in making the most of second chances. He's done it before. From 2003-2006, Byram was incarcerated after what he terms his "knucklehead" days. When he was released, he vowed to make the most of it.

Where some men lament the poor choices of their past, or even let that type of thing control their destinies, Byarm's good nature and positive outlook has kept him looking ever towards the future.

"Honestly, I think a lot of those things prepared me for this time right here," he says. "Those

times tested my patience. They tested my will."

Byarm reflects a bit more, then he tells me how he relates it all to what he does now as a fighter.

"It's the same thing when you get in there to fight, so it's not unfamiliar ground for me. My will has been tested. My patience has been tested. I look at everything that has lead me to this point right here as preparation for this point right here. That's the most positive way to look at it," he says.

"I flip the coin from the negative to the positive side. It's all been preparation."

Preparation is important to a fighter. Fighters have to learn on the fly. They have to learn from their mistakes. They even have to learn from their successes. Show me an undefeated fighter who isn't learning something new, and I'll show you one who isn't going to be undefeated for very long.

Byarm isn't undefeated anymore, but he learned something from his fight with Jennings. In boxing, it is perhaps these kinds of lessons (those learned from defeats) that prove the most beneficial.

"I need to use my jab a little more. I really think that was the difference in my last fight."

Byarm knows Abdusalamov has won every one of his fights by knockout, but he doesn't let it get to him. Instead, Byarm focuses less on Abdusalamov's undefeated record and more on who that record has come against.

"He's been in there with a lot of easy opponents," he tells me. "Not too many guys can intimidate me. I've been in situations where people have tried to intimidate me, and I've handled myself. Lots of people are intimidated by his record, but I'm not easily moved."

Byarm describes his opponent as if he's a commentator or a boxing writer himself. He tells me there are things Abdusalamov does wrong that anybody can see -- that he makes a lot of mistakes. With his opposition, though, Byarm says he can't really tell whether Abdusalamov does these things by mistake or on purpose.

"With a lot of the guys he's fought, he could get away with it," he says.

Byarm didn't have an amateur career, but he tells me he's been boxing with anybody and everybody he could find since the first day he stepped in the gym. He describes himself as a fighter with no style. Imitating legendary Jeet Kun Do master, Bruce Lee, Byarm says he wants to have a style to beat any other style, but also no style at all.

"Be like water, man" he says with a smile. "Water has no shape!"

A win for Maurice Byarm on ESPN would do wonders for his career.Byarm knows it'd put him right back in line as an American heavyweight contender -- exactly what he wants to be. I ask him how he'll do it -- how will he beat Abdusalamov -- but he won't budge an inch.

"I'll show you July 6!"

Finally, I ask Byarm what made him want to start fighting in the first place. While Byarm's father, Lionel, was a professional boxer of note himself, Maurice didn't really pick up the sport until he was an adult.In fact, he made the decision to try his hand at boxing in probably the most interesting way I've ever heard.

"One day I was sitting at home with my dad," he tells me. "We were watching Klitschko fight Byrd."

I asked him which fight it was specifically, whether Vitali's injury loss or one of Wladimir's knockout wins, but he tells me he doesn't even remember which brother it was, much less which fight.

"I was watching the fight, and it just wasn't interesting, so I turned to my dad and told him that I could beat both these guys!"

Lionel, who once stood toe-to-toe with the likes of Evander Holyfield, reportedly just shrugged his shoulders, but Maurice had made up his mind to go to the gym that Monday (which he did).

He laughs about it now.

"I was a casual boxing fan back then…I was one of those guys who had no idea what kind of technique was being used [by those guys]. I was one of those boxing fans who see something on TV and say: man, I can beat that guy! Ha ha…you know?"

Byarm laughs about it now, but he wasn't laughing after a few days in the gym.

"Of course I was naïve and immature in the sport back then," he says. "I realized early on that it takes a whole lot in this sport to get to the level they were fighting at!"

Byarm isn't quite at that level yet, but he's far more removed from his days of couch-side bravado. A win over Magomed Abdusalamov this Friday on ESPN and Byarm will move ever closer to his dream of one day fighting for the heavyweight title.

And who knows? Maybe then he'll really get his shot at one of the Klitschkos.

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the Roast says:

Byarm is going to need a third chance now after betting crushed in two almost one rounds by hard punching Adbusalamalaov. Entertaining night of KO's on FNF tonight. Fortuna looked very impressive blasting out the tough vet in two. I expect more highlights to come from this kid.