

Whatever Happened To Tyrell Biggs?

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Friday, 01 November 2013 09:06



What if I were to tell you there was only one American boxer to ever win an Olympic gold medal in the super heavyweight division? That he beat up both Mike Tyson and Lennox Lewis on the way there? That he was one of the most successful big men in amateur boxing history? That he hailed proudly from the fighting city of Philadelphia?

Would you know it was Tyrell Biggs?

Biggs got only one shot at a world title as a professional, suffering his first loss by seventh round knockout to maybe the most prime version of Mike Tyson ever on October 16, 1987, at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City, New Jersey. That was as good as it got for Biggs, who posted a professional record of 30-10 with 20 KOs.

Biggs told me that remembering the Tyson fight was a mixed bag.

"I guess the high point [of my professional career] was fighting Mike Tyson for the heavyweight championship," said Biggs. "But then the low point was that I didn't win. That was both the high and low of my professional career."

Biggs said he didn't blame his manager, Shelly Finkel, or his trainer, Lou Duva, for moving him along too quickly as a professional. He didn't blame Don King either. He didn't blame anyone.

"You know, I see a lot of write-ups and different quotes people are saying and everyone has their own opinion, but I thought I was going to be able to go fight and beat Tyson at that time. So that's other people's opinion that maybe it was too soon. I don't think it was. I just lost."

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I asked Biggs if he believed it was the right fight at the right time for him.

“Of course, because I was at a point in my career where for me to go in and win the fight it would have set up some pretty good fights for the rest of my career. I think it was the time to do it. I felt I was ready. It just didn’t work out. That happens.”

Biggs said if he could change anything in his professional career, it’d be the strategy he employed against Tyson that night. Biggs had defeated Tyson just a few years earlier as an amateur and said he underestimated the professional version of Iron Mike.

“We had Olympic training camp up in Gonzalez, Texas and me and Tyson fought a box-off for the super heavyweight spot and I beat him pretty good over there. That’s why he didn’t make the Olympic team as a super heavyweight. But he did go on to try and fight at heavyweight, and he lost to Henry Tillman. But we boxed off for the super heavyweight spot and I won that. That’s why he had to try and fight at heavyweight, and he said because he had to lose weight that was why he lost to Tillman. A lot of people don’t know about that.”

Biggs’ success back then made him believe he could outbox Tyson in 1987. It was a mistake.

“I felt as though I could probably outbox him. I felt that all along. I underestimated his speed as opposed to his power. Because everybody knew he was a pretty big puncher. But what I did was underestimate his speed. Because in boxing the punch that you don’t see will hurt you more than the one you do see. And that was the case with Tyson. Not only was he a big puncher but he was a lot faster than what I anticipated.”

So what would he change if he had a do over?

“Probably my attitude. Because when I had the fight with Tyson if I would have went right there and went after him and just tried to beat him up, that probably would have been a different outcome. I was trying to box and be too scientific instead of just going out there and beating him

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up. That's what I would do different."

Tyson beat Biggs up pretty badly that night. Some have said bad enough to steal Biggs' future. The Philadelphian's career never really recovered. The Tyson loss was the first of three straight, and he never came close to being what he was before or what some believe he might have been had he not faced Tyson.

So said Philadelphia's chief boxing historian, John DiSanto.

"As a pro, Tyrell was undefeated going into the Tyson bout, and had beaten some good competition including James Tillis, Jeff Sims, Renaldo Snipes and David Bey. If he didn't have to go through Tyson to be a champion, he very well might have made it to the top. Once he lost to Tyson, he seemed to unravel."

Still, Tyson couldn't rob Biggs of his storied amateur career. The first and only boxer from the United States to bring home Olympic gold in the super heavyweight division has fond memories of that time in his life. I asked Briggs what was his fondest.

"Probably the finals. I had to fight Francesco Damiani. It was the fourth or fifth time that I had to face him [as an amateur]. Just because the fact that we fought a couple times prior to that, it made it that much harder in order to get the victory. But I pulled it out. That was probably my fondest memory. Because it's tough enough to beat a guy once, but to beat a guy three or four times is even tougher."

Biggs said he got into boxing as a youngster because of his father. The sweet science fascinated young Biggs right from the start.

"When I was younger, my dad was a big boxing fan. He'd let me go to the fights down in Atlanta. We'd go to the fights and I would start to determine the good fighters from the not so good fighters. It was fascinating to me to see these guys fight, so all of a sudden my dad had a heavy bag and a speed bag put into our basement and I would go down there and kind of imitate the other fighters hitting the bag and stuff. That's kind of how I got interested in boxing. I

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was probably about 11 or 12 years old at that time.”

Soon, the athletically gifted Biggs decided boxing would be the sport for him.

“Growing up in Philly, there was a big thing about basketball on the streets and I was playing basketball for a little bit and I happened to make the basketball team for West Philadelphia. We won the city championship the whole three years I was there. At the same time, some of the guys were not giving me the ball. They were freezing me out. I would always go back home and start hitting my bag because I would want to punch something for them not letting me get into the basketball game. So then I was just like I’ll go ahead and start boxing because basketball wasn’t going to work.”

But boxing did. Biggs compiled an amateur record of 108-6-4. He won the super heavyweight gold medal in the World Amateur Championships in Munich in 1982, the bronze at the Pan American Game in 1983 and the gold medal a year later at the Olympics in Los Angeles.

But what’s the rest of the story? What happened after the Tyson fight? What of his battle against drug addiction? His stint in rehab? What has his life been since retirement? What does he do now? That’s what director Dafna Yachin, an independent documentary producer/director and Chief Creative Officer at Lunchbox Communications, wants to tell you. Along with award winning filmmaker Trinity Greet, who will co-direct the proposed documentary, Yachin and her cohort of storytellers want to tell you the rest of Biggs’ story.

“Biggs is representative of so many fighters from the past and present,” said Yachin. “What happens when you hit your peak at 25? Tyrell Biggs lives where each of us does, in the space between stellar achievement and catastrophic failure. He inspires all of us through his stoic demeanor. He has every reason to be bitter – against managers who were motivated primarily by dollars, against friends who overlooked the problems they saw, against a system that drives its competitors to undertake too much too fast.”

Yachin does not believe Biggs’ rise and fall is attributed to only him as an individual. Instead, she believes his story represents a greater narrative facing many in today’s culture, especially those who ply their trade as professional prizefighters.

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“It would be unfair to cast as an individual failure what may well have been a systemic failure, which is why Tyrell’s story needs to be told against the larger backdrop of the business of boxing. Nevertheless, Tyrell’s story remains undeniably a human tragedy – one whose consequences have reshaped and redefined the life of a single human being.”

And what does this have to do with you? That’s the easy part. You see, Yachin is right. We are all Tyrell Biggs. All of us. Each of us is where he has been, in one way or another. Some of us are successful leaders in our chosen industries. Others of us toil long hours at jobs we’d rather not think about. None of us are where we’ll be someday. Up or down, everything changes. Biggs has seen it all. He’s done it all. And Yachin wants to hold his life up to us as if it were a mirror.

But she needs our help.

“If we don’t reach our Kickstarter goal, this great story may not get completed,” said Yachin. “This is an opportunity for everyone to help be a documentary maker.”

Yachin’s film, *Whatever Happened to Tyrell Biggs?*, is a sports biopic intended to shine a light on the importance of after-school programs and community engagement with inner city youth. It is more than just a story about Biggs. It’s a story about boxing and boxers from Philadelphia, about hopes and dreams of fighters from all walks of life, and about why the sport and culture of boxing is unlike any other.

“This summer marks the 30th anniversary of the 1984 Olympics as well as the 30th year of Tyrell Bigg’s sobriety,” said Yachin. “So it is the perfect time to tell Tyrell’s history-making biography while exploring the relationship of future hopefuls, such as Jesse Hart and Gabriel Rosado, [who are] working with Philadelphia legends to bring back Philly’s reputation as the boxing capital of the world.”

[Click here to help fund this project.](#)

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The Shadow says:

That's what happened: [url]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDoIM1dRzGo

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miguel1 says:

That was a nice peice, and Tyrell seems realistic, which is refreshing. I seriously had thoughts of Buster Dougals, Riddick Bowe and Tyrell in a pie eating contest.

Radam G says:

I'm not going to throw any mud yet. But this piece has some serious errors in fact. Especially what went down in Texas and Tyrell's amateur record. I'm not sure what that "-4" stands for. Hopefully not for draws. There are and were no draws in amateur boxing. And it was a sparring session in Texas, not a box off. Box offs don't and didn't come before the Olympic trails. Some straight-up vive is rolling up. Next I expect for architect of this to say it was an unofficial box off.

It is amazing how history suddenly changes. C'mon eye'witnesses of those days -- HOLLA!
Holla!

Radam G says:

Nobody gets a box off in two different divisions. Those drugs have done damage to TB's brain cells. Holla!

The Shadow says:

Yeah, fighters are notorious for their proclivity for revisionist history.

Preach, RG! Tell 'em about the sparring sessions.

miguel1 says:

Gotcha radam obviously that stuff is important. but I got from the piece that Biggs seemed realistic about looking back, and not just bitter vitriol like you sometimes get. i thought it had value for that reason.

Radam G says:

If he were realistic, he'd start by telling the truth. Commonsense should tell him that somebody

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will out him for fibbing. Maybe he is special and beat Iron Mike in alternate reality. Or maybe the powerful Bob Cough Syrup did some restricted secret stuff that only TB knows about.

How much sense would it make to give Iron Mike shots in two different divisions when the powers that be didn't do it for others fighters.

OMG! Every team would be protesting. The late Rick Womack could beat Hillman. So it seem fair if they let Iron Mike come down to heavy, why did not they let Ricky go up to heavy after he lost to Evander Holyfield at light heavy? Holla!

Radam G says:

BTW, Iron Mike beat da holy hebe√eebees outta TB. So TB was not allow to spar with the iron one anymore, because there was a BIG-TIME FEELING that Iron Mike would hurt him and that TB would then not be able to go to the O-Games.

Matter of fact, Bob Cough Syrup put the word out for no fighters to spar with Mike. But Holyfield did it anyway. He was never frighten of Mike. Holla!

The Shadow says:

[QUOTE=Radam G;39416]BTW, Iron Mike beat da holy hebe√eebees outta TB. So TB was not allow to spar with the iron one anymore, because there was a BIG-TIME FEELING that Iron Mike would hurt him and that TB would then not be able to go to the O-Games.

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I've noticed, unless there's a decisive outcome in sports, athletes will delude themselves into thinking they got the better of a situation they obviously did not hahahaha!

This might be what this is. I don't see this guy doing anything with a young, raw Tyson. Maybe beat him in basketball, I don't know.

Speaking of basketball players, did yall know Prince the singer is a helluva hooper? I read an article today, had me crackin' UP!

The Shadow says:

Dude would outrun people in his heels and spandex pants, cross people up, grab rebounds from underneath people. Apparently, with heels he was a solid 5-7 hahahaha. He also had a SWEET jumper, the legend goes. His coach in high school said he was a great player. LOL

The Shadow says:

BTW! Adages, maxims, cliches and sayings are many in the sweet science.

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Yet, the one I think has the most merit and always holds true is one I, paraphrasing perhaps, can attribute to Big Cus D'Amato and is interesting to consider when considering Evan Fields:

[I]"When two fighters meet, the fighter with the greatest will always prevail unless one fighter's skill is so superior that his will is never tested. [/I]

Think about that for a minute. That's some true s***!

Radam G says:

Oh BOY, don't I know that Prince Roger Nelson can throw down with the B-ball. Did you also know about his Pinoy blood? Man, I get around. I get around! The royal one and I use to run in the same circles. He's known to occasionally hide in plain sight.

It's a small world and is getting smaller by the minute. Holla!

The Shadow says:

[QUOTE=Radam G;39511]Oh BOY, don't I know that Prince Roger Nelson can throw down with the B-ball. Did you also know about his Pinoy blood? Man, I get around. I get around! The royal one and I use to run in the same circles. He's known to occasionally hide in plain sight.

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LOL!!! He got Pinoy in him? GTF0H, man! He doesn't look like he "got some s*** in 'im." Didn't know it was that, though! Pinoys can ball, though, y'all got some calves so swole one would think they were enhanced by da meth.

I'm tellin' ya, I read some funny articles today after hearing Charlie Murphy talking about it in a radio interview -- and being dead serious.

Hop says:

Unlike many of you on here who have hobnobbed plenty with big name boxers, Biggs is the only HW I've ever been in close physical proximity to. LOL Walked behind him at LAX is all. (Aren't you happy I shared that?) He was flanked by a small team of handlers. This might have been around the time of the Los Angeles Olympics (where he won gold). Looked in his prime.

Radam G says:

@The Shadow, you'd be shock of the number of superstar musicians and movie actors who are full of Pinoy blood. I'm sure that you can google one of many lists.

Man, we and our A-side meth calves be hiding everywhere up in plain sight. Hehehe! Holla!