

The World Needs More Mike Tysons

Written by Michael Woods

Thursday, 14 November 2013 11:15



It says something about the tableau of boxing that on the really short list of the most compelling figures in all of sports in the last hundred or more years is two boxers, Muhammad Ali, and Mike Tyson.

The sport is attractive to a certain sort of soul, oftentimes a person who is looking to fill a vacuum in their being which others, with more structure, in a more stable or serene or financially secure environment, don't have to address.

Mike Tyson's upbringing was the sort which insured that the young man would go down only a couple paths. The more likely one was the premature placement into a coffin, or a lifetime stint in a penitentiary. The road luckily taken for Tyson, after the system and fate intervened on his behalf, was an entry into the fight game. His story is not unfamiliar to any of us who have even a passing interest in the sweet science, and possess a curiosity about what makes these warriors who enthrall us with their skill, and savagery and will and courage make the choices they do, instead of choosing the easier doors which most of us pass through when presented with options, the safer, easier, less risky vocations.

But almost thirty years after he exploded on the scene to become the youngest heavyweight champion in history, conjuring shock and awe at his power and untameable ferocity, Tyson's history, and the manner in which he presents the chapters of his life for the public, still has us seeking out material which sheds light on the dark depths of an alternately tortured and enlightened spirit. HBO gives us the opportunity to ponder the fascinating arc of the man once dubbed The Baddest Man on the Planet, or Kid Dynamite, or Iron Mike, but who today is perhaps the most representative of the rags to riches to rags tale our society can boast. On Saturday night at 8 PM, the cabler will air "Mike Tyson: Undisputed Truth," a Spike Lee-produced 90 minute effort which is taken from the now 47-year-old's one-man stage show, which has drawn immense crowds from coast to coast.

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Even if you fancy yourself intimately familiar with all the chapters, sordid and otherwise, and deem yourself an expert on his hardscrabble early years in Bed-Stuy and Brownsville, where he learned to pillage and plunder to satisfy an urge for booty and to intimidate, and his entry into the world of pugilism, taught by the ring sage Cus D'Amato, to his rise and fall as a champion who earned mega-millions and the admiration of the masses only to learn that money can't buy serenity, you will likely enjoy the Lee film.

"Thank you for coming out tonight and welcome to my living room," Tyson says, greeting an NYC audience, while immediately disarming those that came reluctantly, or had a pre-conceived notion that he is a neanderthal knucklehead who exists mostly as a symbol of how one should not handle the thrust into the celebrity spotlight. He admits right away that he himself wasn't sure if he should do this stage show, and sends notice that he is a complex character. He boasts of being the guy who kayoed emeffers in thirty seconds right after admitting that he's not sure of his worth, that he can bring anything righteous to the table, and deftly puts the fears of any doubters in the audience at bay. Tyson is a skilled comedian, cracking that he's actually been on Broadway before...when he got arrested on the avenue of Broadway in Manhattan many moons ago.

The material is PG-13, R and even some X stuff, but the rowdier fare is handled with aplomb. He doesn't skirt any issue, even his arrest and incarceration for rape. Still photos flash behind the ex fighter/artist, and he riffs off the snapshots. The script, which he memorized, allows Tyson to give us squares some insight we can't even fathom. Like, his biological dad was a pimp, he says, and isn't the same guy who is listed on his birth certificate, who was a humble cab driver. He would have preferred, back in the day, that the pimp was sen as his "real dad," because that would have carried more weight in the hood.

I'm not going to give a full-on recap, as I don't want anyone to read this, and blow off the showing. That's not fair to anyone..I'll end by saying I recommend the show fully, and by stating that I dare say I think the world needs more Mike Tysons. No, not the thuggy version who wreaked havoc on the streets and hearts of too many people who came into his orbit. That guy was a waste of space, boasting almost no redeeming qualities. But the self-aware version, who is unafraid and in fact compelled to examine and claim and process all the seedy and cowardly and exceedingly common sides of himself, he is in fact a role model.

While most of us put forth the version of self we want the world to believe is fact, in person, on Facebook, 99.9% of the time, Mike Tyson is out there trafficking in truth. In the Lee film, it is for our entertainment, and the production succeeds mightily on that front. As a blueprint for living that examined life which our society, with its encompassing embrace of flimsy values, of the

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pursuit of obscene wealth, of the unfathomably grotesque refutation of science which results in the world's power brokers refusing to acknowledge that man is contributing to catastrophic climate change and monthly natural disasters, Mike Tyson's Undisputed Truth succeeds on an even grander scale.

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The Shadow says:

Here's an AWESOME Tyson story:

[url]<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/read-an-excerpt-from-mike-tysons-undisputed-truth-20131112>

leon30001 says:

Hey Woods, quick "yes or "no" question: is the northwest tropical Pacific getting warmer?

brownsugar says:

I've seen some segments of the show... The routine would be a solid assignment for an actor.. Not to mention a former drug abusing fighter who is probably shy a few trillion brain cells (even if it is about his own personal history)

That in itself is inspiring.

And as an added bonus, Tyson has the timing, delivery, vocal inflections, and body language polished to perfection.

Tyson and Lee have taken the dreggs of Tysons' despair and crafted an authentic piece of entertainment..(worthy enough to be called art) that's every bit as satisfying as his fights used to be.

Who woulda ' thought he had it in him?

The Shadow says:

Mike Tyson is not to be denied. He can do anything he puts his mind to.

Domenic says:

I love Tyson think he's one of the most remarkable figures of my lifetime. Nothing like Tyson

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back in the 80s before the internet and PPV everything just waiting for HBO Saturday to begin. George Bush 41 was prez and Tyson was like none other. A world away from now but have such nostalgia for that boxing era and even the early to mid 90s. Mike got railroaded in Indiana but took it like a man. You look at the people that get away with murder like that girl in Orlando who killed her toddler and stands trial and gets off and you wonder how the hell Tyson lost that one. Think the pre 24 hour news cycle helped as well as Court TV and the rest. Had it been televised and more widely followed it might have been different. Also should have hired the Tyson of criminal defense attorneys and not a tax attorney. Anyway, Tyson is a gigantic figure in our culture that can't be denied.

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Good points Domenic... Tyson got himself into a stupid situation...and was made an example of...

leon30001 says:

...one more question, Michael: from where were these direct quotes drawn?

"confidence remains LOW for long-term (centennial) changes in tropical cyclone activity..."

"confidence in large scale trends in storminess or storminess proxies over the last century is LOW..."

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...it was the IPCC, AR5. But I'm sure you knew that already.