

# KING

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Ten years ago today, he was No. 125735 in the Ohio State Penitentiary in Marion, Ohio.

He was still a year away from completing the 48-month stretch he drew for manslaughter after strangling a fellow numbers runner in Cleveland in a money dispute.

He spent his time in the slammer, he said, reading Voltaire and Shakespeare & Tolstoy and by taking correspondence courses in economics through Ohio University in Athen, Ohio.

On Sept. 21, 1971, No. 125735 became Donald Ferris King again — and the business of professional boxing was changed forever.

On Thursday, Oct. 2, in a specially — On Thursday, Oct. 2, in a specially — made stadium parking lot next to Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, with 25,000 people watching in person and 2 billion people watching on closed-circuit television throughout the world (yes, they'll even be watching for the first time ever in the Soviet Union and in China), Don King will stage the most lucrative match in the history of professional boxing.

Muhammad Ali vs. Larry Holmes for the heavyweight championship of the World Boxing Council and a split of \$14 million (\$8 million for Ali, \$6 million for Holmes) from a bottom line that could wind up as high as \$70 million (King, himself, estimates that closed-circuit theatre television income alone could be \$60 million — and that's \$190 million more than came in from the richest closest-circuit theatre television fight ever, Roberto Duran vs Sugar Ray Leonard last June in Montreal).

Ah, that Don King. He

sure did revolutionize the business of promoting professional boxing:

He brought whole governments in as his partners (Zaire, Malaysia, the Philippines; he reduced to nothing what had been the biggest expenses of other promoters — training costs, lodging, meals, travel, site rentals — by bringing in casino hotels as his partners (Caesars Palace and the Hilton Hotel in Las Vegas, to name two); he turned upside down the money structure of boxing by guaranteeing his combatants million dollar purses in advance, an unheard-of act in a sport where promoters always seemed to die penniless — and he did all of this in less than a decade after being sprung from Slam City.

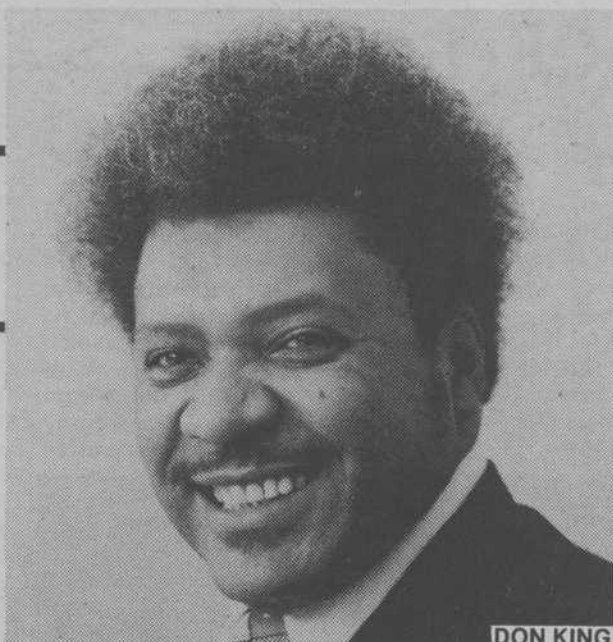
Don King, clearly, makes even Horatio Alger resemble a sloth indolent, if not a total failure.

Yet, Don King is something of a Rodney Dangerfield in the respect in either. He is dismissed by sports writers time and again, no matter his business acumen or his string of profitable promotions, as a clown, a con man and, always an excon.

His picture has never appeared on the cover of Business Week, and the Wall Street Journal doesn't do long profiles of him — even though Don King now 49, may be the most successful black businessman in the United States today.

Proof?

He admits to being a millionaire, which is something of an understatement when you consider that he's made multi-millionaires of Holmes, Ali, Duran and George Foreman, to name his prized products, and near-millionaires



DON KING

of old warhorses such as Ernie Shavers and Ken Norton.

He owns outright a \$250,000 townhouse in Midtown Manhattan. Outright he says, means that it's all paid for.

He owns outright the building at 32 East 69th St., corner of Madison Ave., in Manhattan that houses his company, Don King Productions, Inc., and is worth \$2 million by itself.

He also owns outright a \$250,000 winter home on Star Island, between the cities of Miami and Miami Beach, Fla.

He owns outright a 500-acre ranch in Ohio, where his wife breeds cattle and where he runs a training camp and gym for young fighters on the way up, such as Michael Dokes, and some on the way down, such as Leon Spinks.

He wears diamond necklaces and sometimes three diamond rings at a time. He travels in chauffeured limousines and in private foreign government jet — he has been a palace guest, he says, of the presidents of such countries as Nigeria, Ghana, Panama, Zambia, Zaire, and Liberia; once, he even was the palace guest of the last Shah of Iran. His personal friends, he says, include David Rockefeller, Henry Kissinger, even James

Earl Carter, for whom he campaigned in 1976.

Boxing, Don King explains, is the world's only true international sport and it just happens to be that presidents, kings, shahs, generals, bank presidents, secretaries of state, dictators and even despots all like boxing — which is what gives him his entree to royalty.

Still, Don King is annoyed by the contradictions. He is clearly bothered when you mention to him that he is accepted and respected, it seems, everywhere but where it counts the most — in American sporting and business circles.

Pete Rozelle, Ray Kroc, George Steinbrenner, to name a few, command unqualified respect in Sports World for their money-making business practices — yet they're pure molasses and milquetoast when matched against Don King's rocketship rise through the stratosphere in the nine years since he's been out of jail.

So why doesn't anybody take Don King seriously?

In a wide-ranging interview with the Herald Examiner here Thursday at the Laird Productions movie studio in Culver City, Don King gave his answer to that question: They do take him

seriously.

As a matter of fact, he said, some people actually take him so seriously that they fear him because of his success, and some people envy him his accomplishments and wealth, and some people, well, they're just plain racists who burn inside with the fires of Hell whenever a black man makes it big in what had been a profession previously dominated by white men.

The end result, he said, is a double-barreled view of him: The indifference and contempt on the outside really disguise a terror on the inside.

On that subject, he said: "Imagery is created by the media. Now I know that an overwhelming majority of

sports writers are white and a lot of them think they're experts, experts in boxing, experts in business, experts in everything, and along comes this nigger from the ghetto, out of prison, for Godssakes, who turns the whole thing upside down and shows them they're not experts after all — what do you expect them to do? Make a saint out of me?"

"I did things no other promoter in the history of boxing ever did before. I made them work. All the rules went out the window when I arrived. What promoter ever got a foreign government to guarantee a \$10 million purse before I arrived on the scene? I was unheard of. I still get this snide press and yes, it bothers me

(See King page 20)

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