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SPORTLIGHT

WORLD-RANKED JOHNSON RETURNS TO SHOWBOAT VS. GUY OCT. 8

By R.L. Greene

(Editor's Note: This is the eighth in a series of articles on the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games.)

NEW YORK—An age-old query wonders if when a tree falls in the forest and there's no one to hear it, does it make any noise?

Charles Lake has made about as much noise as that secluded tree while becoming America's best. And he quietly made it while being witnessed by thousands.

"I am a gymnast," Lakes says. "I don't think of myself as a Black gymnast."

A 24-year-old native of St. Louis who grew up in Pasadena, Calif., Lakes won the men's title at the U.S. Olympic gymnastics trials in Salt Lake City. He thus becomes the second Black to make the U.S. Olympic gymnastic team and the first to represent this country in an Olympic Games. The first was Ron Galimore, son of the late Florida A&M and Chicago Bears running back, who made the 1980 Olympic team but wasn't able to participate because of the American-led boycott of the Moscow Games.

When Lake competed in Seoul, it was the culmination of a long-held dream. He first walked into the Southern California gym of Dan Connelly when he was 12 years old and told the coach he wanted to be a gymnast.

"I came to him in the middle of the month, so he told me to come back at the beginning of next month," Lakes remembers. "I told him I couldn't; I had to make it to the Olympic Games. I had to start training right away."

It was that kind of far-sightedness and dedication that has carried Lakes to being the top gymnast, Numero Uno, in the United States. "He let me stay," Lakes says of Connelly some 12 years ago. "He watched me work out. He saw I had talent and he let me stay."

Lakes wasn't the only Black competing in the U.S.

Olympic Gymnastics Trials. Curtis Holdsworth, a UCLA standout, was there, as was Joyce Wilborn of Patterson, N.J. But neither Holdsworth nor Wilborn made the Olympic squad, although Wilborn did receive a perfect score of 10.0 on the vault during the competition.

In the U.S. Gymnastics competition, held in Houston in July, Lakes finished third and Holdsworth, from Wilbraham, Mass., was fourth. Wilborn was 13th in the women's all-around standings.

While Lakes is a virtual unknown among the general public, who generally pay attention to the sport only during the Olympics, he has been the focus of criticism in the gymnastics world for some time. Like Blacks in others sports, Lakes has been accused of being lazy. And the fact he is outspoken also has worked against him.

"A lot of people think of me as inconsistent or not hard-working," he says. "That's because I don't spend 10 hours a day in the gym like they do. I don't think you have to spend that much time in a gym. But I do work hard."

He says his upbringing also has had a major impact on the way he is.

His father was a school administrator in St. Louis. But the family moved to Pasadena when his father took a job with Blue Cross. Now his father owns two companies that deal with insurance and human resources.

"My father and my mom, they're from a different time. They were much more consciously aware of it (racial problems) and had to deal

with it more than I had to deal with it. They tried to not make me feel any different. I have been accepted."

And that's why Lakes disagrees with America's top figure skater, Debi Thomas. "I personally don't think of myself as a role model, but if others see me as a role model and I can do something to shape their future in this direction, I will accept that position," Lakes told the Washington Post. "I'd love to have more people involved in the sport. It's a great sport, I think."

"But my feelings are very much unlike Debi's. I personally feel the same way she does, but she didn't go the extra step to at least accept the responsibility for her position because other people saw her as a role model. She still should take the responsibility for the way other people are going to view her now because she is Black."

"A lot of other (Black) people don't think the way she does because maybe they didn't grow up the same way. Most people did grow up in a predominantly Black neighborhood and so they look to Black figures as role models. That's just the way things are."

Mike Johnson, who has cracked the world rankings after a knockout win over previously undefeated Engelles Pedroza, faces junior welterweight Robert Guy in the main event on the monthly "Boxing at the Boat" professional card Saturday, Oct. 8, at the Showboat Hotel, Casino, Country Club and Bowling Center.

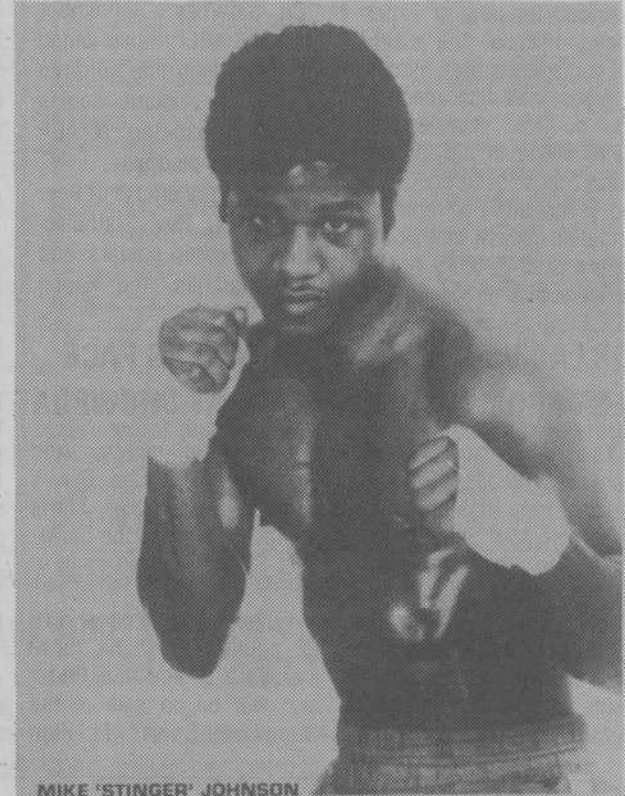
Johnson from Ypsilanti, Mich., has a record of 16-1-2 with 11 knockouts and is ranked No. 5 by the World Boxing Association. Guy from Fort Worth, Texas, has a record of 11-1-2 with eight knockouts.

Four other bouts are on the card in addition to the 10-round main event, featuring four undefeated fighters and two Las Vegas.

The card, promoted by the Showboat, starts at 7 p.m. with doors to the Showboat Sports Pavilion opening at 6. Tickets, priced at \$12 for general admission and \$20 for ringside reserved, are on sale from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday at the Showboat Sports Pavilion Ticket Office.

Johnson burst into international prominence on June 17 when he stopped the highly regarded, hard-hitting Pedroza in the ninth round at

See FIGHT, Page 12



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