

SENTINEL SPORTS

Tyson, Trainer Bound By Memories Of Mentor

LAS VEGAS - Only a small, rising tinge of redness around Jay Bright's ears betrayed his struggle to keep his anger inside as a reporter baited him that the surrogate father he and Mike Tyson idealised had been a fraud.

Bright, training Tyson for his first fight on Saturday after a four-year layoff that included a three-year prison term for rape, calmly and respectfully answered the sarcastic questions about the late Cus D'Amato at an impromptu news conference.

That brief encounter displaying loyalty and calm under fire, much more than Bright's often-criticised knowledge of hooks and jabs, best reveals why Tyson, 29, chose his trusted, long-time friend to train him for the fight.

"Especially in his first fight back when he looks into his corner it's important to see a face he trusts," said Bright.

Tyson is expected to easily dispatch the obscure Peter McNeeley in the scheduled 10-

round bout at the MGM Grand Hotel.

"My main concern is to be there for Cus's fighter, to be there for Mike," said Bright, one of Tyson's oldest friends.

The two are nothing if not absolutely devoted to — some would say obsessed with — the memory of D'Amato and his teachings, which 10 years after his death they still embrace as mantras to cope with and explain away everything in life and in boxing.

And it is Bright's and Tyson's connection with D'Amato and their comfort in sharing that knowledge he dispensed that Bright says is very important to Tyson as he begins his quest to regain the undisputed heavyweight championship.

D'Amato had homespun aphorisms about understanding fear, learning the power of the mind over the body, about not lying to yourself and probably about how to drink coffee.

He was a crusty old fight guy who guided Floyd Patterson and Jose Torres to world titles, battled

the mob's control of the sport and along the way developed a deeply-ingrained paranoia about life and particularly boxing.

Even those who respected D'Amato say he was not beyond manipulating people and stretching the truth a bit. And it is generally believed that D'Amato more than once interceded with authorities to secure lenient treatment for Tyson when he got in trouble as a teenager.

But Bright, 37, would not concede any of this under the reporter's barrage.

Asked if D'Amato ever told a lie, Bright would say only that he never knew him to lie and that D'Amato said: "Lying detones incompetency."

"Cus had flaws but he's not here to give me permission" to talk about them, said Bright, who was orphaned when he was 13.

Tyson and Bright came under the D'Amato spell when as troubled youths they went to live in D'Amato's rambling home in Catskill, New York.

D'Amato saw a promising fighter in the young, tough Tyson

whom he took in from a state reformatory.

"As Cus said, 'everything that denotes success in life is magnified in boxing,'" Bright said.

D'Amato also took in Teddy Atlas, one of Tyson's first trainers and now the trainer of former heavyweight champion Michael Moorer. He also moulded Kevin Rooney, who took Tyson to the undisputed heavyweight title before the fighter fired him for criticising Tyson's wife at the time.

D'Amato's influence "saved Mike. It saved me. It saved Kevin. It saved Teddy," Bright said. "It saved everyone who went through there. Everyone came away with a wealth of knowledge about boxing, about life.



Many wonder if King has ruined what D'Amato started

"Mike had layers and layers of callouses on him. Cus stripped away all those layers and got down to the real Mike," said Bright, a chunky, handsome man who is a graduate of the well-respected Bard College not far from Catskill.

Bright also insists that Tyson, the man who once boasted of

trying to punch his opponents' nose bones into their brains "is a terrific person. That dead calmness that he has in the ring lead people to believe that's what he is on the outside. But that's not the way he is. He's an amiable, terrific guy."

But a jury in Indianapolis did not think he was so terrific, convicting him of raping a beauty pageant contestant.

What happened to D'Amato's teachings when it came to knowing how to treat women? the persistent reporter asked.

"Mike was forewarned about all the aspects of being a champion. But knowing something and acting on them are two different things," Bright said.

Bright, who said he does not have a contract with Tyson because they are "family," said he himself had not had enough influence before to keep the fighter out of trouble. "I was the guy in the background then. Mike before he was in prison was on a roller coaster ride and that over-shadowed things," he said. "You can't spank someone and send him home."

The tale of the tape for Saturday night' heavyweight fight between Mike Tyson (41-1, 36 KOs) and Peter McNeeley (36-1, 30 KOs) at Las Vegas:

	TYSON	MCNEELEY
AGE	29	26
WEIGHT	x-218	x-222
HEIGHT	5-11 1/2	6-2
REACH	71	77
CHEST NORMAL	43	46
CHEST EXPANDED	45	48
BICEPS	16	16
FOREARM	14	14
WAIST	34	34
THIGH	27	27
CALF	18	21
NECK	19 3/4	19 1/2
WRIST	8	10
FIST	13	14
ANKLE	11	12

x-estimated weight. Exact weight to be determined at weigh-in.

Wilkins To Play In Greece

Boston Celtics forward Dominique Wilkins has apparently left the team to play for a pro team in Greece.

Panathinaikos Athens said it has signed Wilkins to a two-year contract worth \$7 million, the richest deal for a player outside the National Basketball Association.

Celtics officials could not be reached for comment.

Wilkins had two years left on his contract with the Celtics, but the deal contained a buyout clause.

Wilkins and Celtics have been at odds over an \$8.4 million loan provision in the player's contract. Wilkins' agent, Steve Kauffman, claimed that the Celtics did not honor a loan provision in Wilkins' contract due to the N-B-A lockout.

Kauffman claims the availability of the loan, worth approximately \$8.4 million, was a separate clause in Wilkins' contract and was to be honored

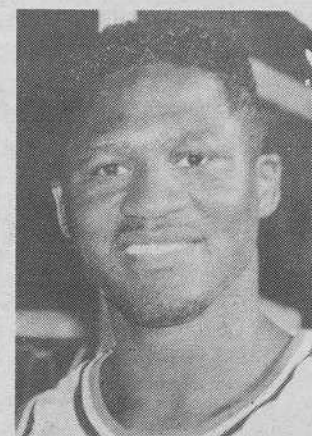
without any contingencies, including a work stoppage.

According to regulations of the old collective bargaining agreement, a team can loan a player the amount of his guaranteed contract plus \$250,000 with an interest rate of 10 per cent. Wilkins was due to make \$3.7 million this season and \$4.5 million next year. The two figures, along with the \$250,000, account for the \$8.4 million.

Jeffrey Mishkin, senior vice president of legal affairs for the N-B-A, said the Celtics' interpretation of the loan status is correct.

The N-B-A imposed a lockout July 1st after the Players Association postponed a vote on a new collective bargaining agreement due to pressure from a group of agents and players seeking decertification of the union.

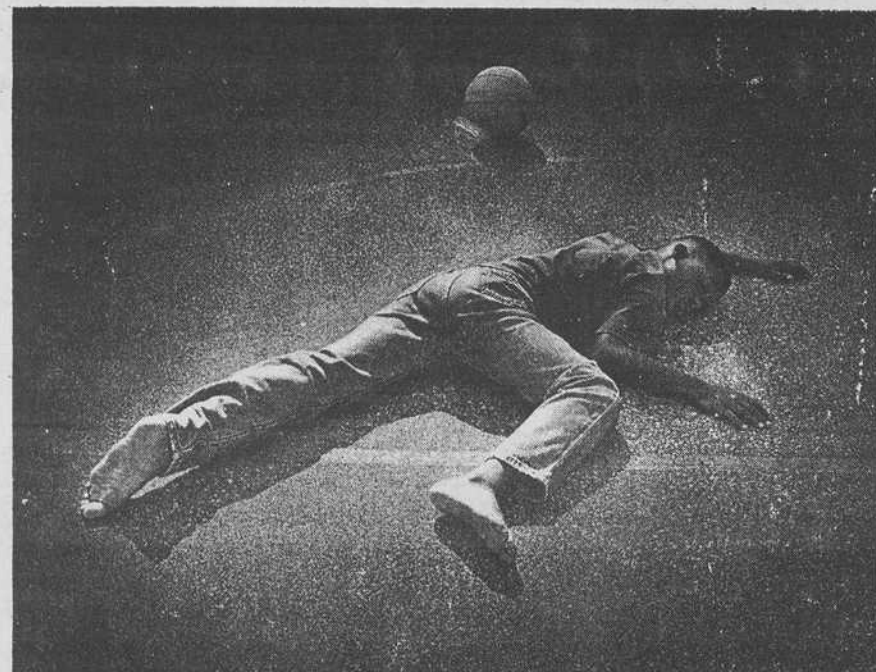
The 35-year-old Wilkins averaged 17.8 points for the



Dominique Wilkins

Celtics last year, his lowest scoring average since his rookie year. He also shot a career-low 42 per cent from the field.

Wilkins played more than 11 years with the Atlanta Hawks and won the N-B-A scoring title in 1985-86 when he averaged 30.3 points per game. He was traded to the Los Angeles Clippers in February of 1994 for forward Danny Manning and signed as a free agent with the Celtics in July of 1994.



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