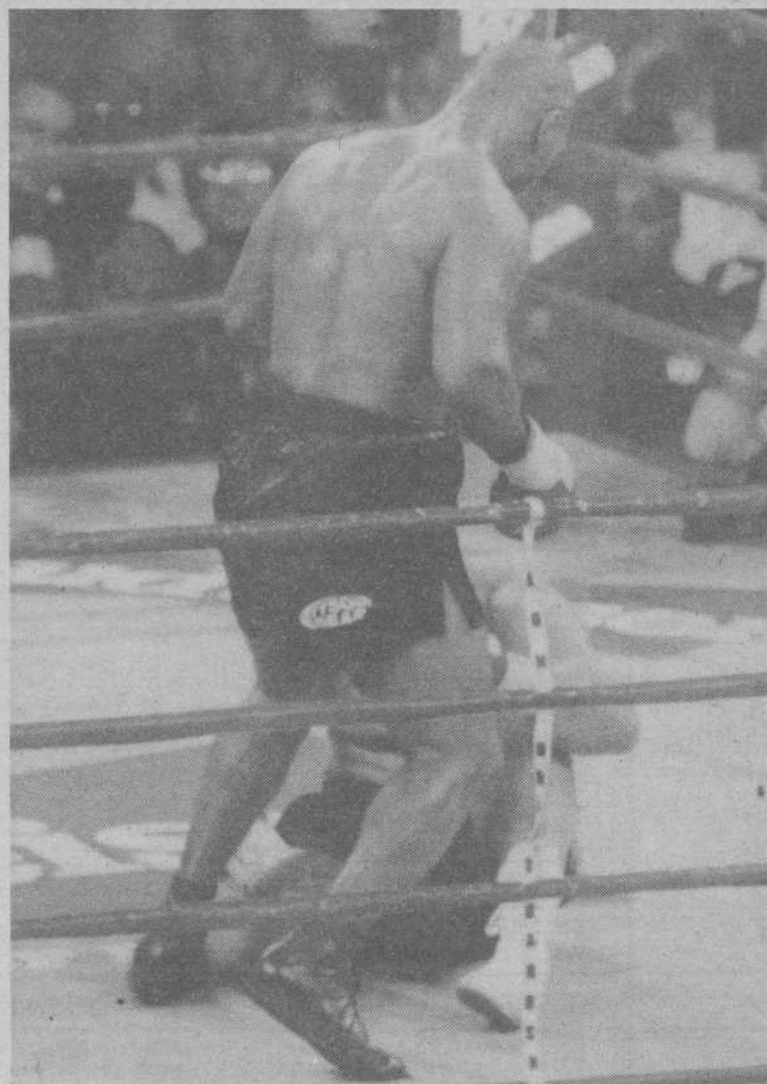


Chronology of a comeback...



Though Mike Tyson won his debut bout after coming off an 18-month suspension for biting Evander Holyfield's ears during their June 1997 heavyweight championship fight, the former champ slugged through five rounds with Botha before ending the fight with a crushing right hand 2:51 into the fifth round.



Sentinel-Voice photos by Jonathan Olsen/Front Row Photos

Tyson not Tyson-like in win over Botha

By Huel Washington
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Mike Tyson would have done well to emulate football players who point toward the heavens after some measure of gridiron success — be it scoring a touchdown or registering a sack.

The former undisputed heavyweight champion should have looked skyward and offered praise seconds after referee Richard Steele counted Francois Botha out to end their 10-round fight at the MGM Grand Garden on Saturday. Somebody up there likes Iron Mike.

The 18-month suspension following his ear-biting debacle during the June 1997 title fight with Evander Holyfield — which happened in the same ring — has taken a toll on Tyson's skills. He was slow and awkward, with his physique offering the only semblance of the once-invincible fighter who attracted legions of fans. He got a D-plus.

Through the first four-and-a-half rounds, Tyson lunged at the "White Buffalo" and missed. He didn't throw combinations and the punches he did land were ineffective.

By the end of the fourth round, two judges had Botha ahead 40-35. Only Bill Graham giving the second round to Tyson. Graham scored the fight 39-36 for Botha. Tyson had been penalized one point in the second round for hitting Botha after being told to break.

Botha was winning the fifth round when, as he put it, "I walked into a right hand that I didn't see and he (Tyson) knocked me down."

Tyson caught him with a right to the chin, reminiscent of the Rocky Marciano-Jersey Joe Walcott ending. He was able to land the punch because Botha grew overconfident after effectively flustering the former champ for several rounds. He showboated and dropped his hands to his side.

"We learned a lot of things tonight," Tyson's trainer Tommy Brooks said after the fight. "He was missing his punches and looping them most of the fight. I told him (Tyson) to start throwing straight punches and that's how he was able to catch him with that right hand."

And he was right. Tyson didn't set his opponent up and then deliver the finishing blow. Botha got careless and ended up on the canvass. Tyson needs plenty of work if he's hoping for Tyson-Holyfield III.

Tyson began fighting professionally after the 1984 Olympics — he was an alternate on the team — and in two years he fought 28 times, 1985 (15), 1986 (13). In the 13 years hence, he's fought 21 times.

From 1992 to 1994, he didn't fight at all, thanks to being incarcerated in an Indiana Prison on a rape conviction. Despite easy victories over Peter McNeely, Bruce Seldon and Frank Bruno following his release, Tyson's skills had diminished.

He needs plenty work for a successful second comeback. But where's he going to get that work?

No one knows but his manager Shelly Finkel. One thing is certain: He should stay away from Vaughn Bean. Bean put up a sterling performance against Holyfield and some think Holyfield won via a hometown decision.

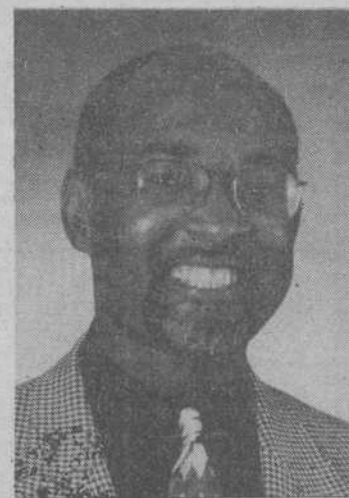
Another thing is also clear: Tyson is still an attraction, despite a less-than-attractive performance.

He proved he could keep his cool under stress by weathering Botha's taunts. "I tried to get him riled up. We said some things that I can't repeat here," Botha said after the fight.

Now Tyson needs to shake off the rust and give the fans what they want: The old Iron Mike.

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