

## SPORTS

## Holyfield seeking return to top of boxing's heavyweight ranks

NEW YORK (AP) — Becoming a four-time heavyweight champion might make history, but it's just a means to an end for Evander Holyfield.

A victory over John Ruiz on June 10 in Las Vegas would be "moving toward the goal of being undisputed heavyweight champion," Holyfield said.

The 37-year-old fighter was the undisputed heavyweight champion in 1990-92 after winning the WBC, WBA and IBF titles on a third-round knockout of James "Buster" Douglas.

He had a chance to unify those titles again when as WBA-IBF champion he fought WBC champion Lennox Lewis twice in 1999.

The first fight was a draw, and Lewis won a unanimous decision in the rematch Nov. 13.

"If the decision had gone my way, I would have quit," Holyfield said Thursday during a conference call. "Until I reach my goal there is no reason to quit."

Holyfield is getting a chance to become a four-time champion because a federal judge ruled Lewis breached a contract by not making a WBA mandatory defense before fighting Michael Grant, whom he stopped in the second round April 29.

Ruiz is ranked No. 1 and Holyfield is ranked second by the WBA.

Holyfield is a solid favorite to beat his 28-year-old op-

ponent at Caesars Palace. Ruiz has a 36-3 record, with 27 knockouts, beating mostly low-level competition. One of his losses came when he was knocked out in 19 seconds on March 5, 1996.

"My job as a fighter is to go out there and fight whoever is there," Holyfield said. "Whoever I fight I must be the best I can be."

Holyfield lost the undisputed title to Riddick Bowe, then became heavyweight champion a second time by winning the WBA and IBF titles from Bowe.

He lost them to Michael Moore, then became a champion for the third time by winning the WBA title by stopping Mike Tyson in the 11th round in 1996.

## Rose named NBA's most improved player

INDIANAPOLIS (AP) — Three years after being virtually ignored by his former coach, Jalen Rose received the NBA's Most Improved Player Award on Wednesday.

Rose refused to lose confidence when ex-Indiana Pacers coach Larry Brown kept him on the bench for 14 games during the 1996-97 season.

Given a starting role this season for the first time in four years with the Pacers, Rose became the first player other than Reggie Miller to lead the team in scoring since 1988-89. The 6-foot-8 forward averaged a career-high 18.2 points, 7.1 better than his previous best, as Indiana secured the top regular-season record in the Eastern Conference.

Rose also had career highs in rebounds (4.8), steals (1.05), minutes (37.2), games (80), 3-point field goal percentage (.393) and free-throw percentage (.827).

In balloting by a nationwide panel of sports writers and broadcasters, Rose received 32 of 121 votes. Dallas' Dirk Nowitzki was second with 25 votes, followed by Detroit's Jerry Stackhouse (19) and Indiana's Austin Croshere (17).

"What a wonderful honor," teammate

Mark Jackson said. "He's very deserving of it. A guy that didn't pout and hang his head and stop working on his game when things weren't going his way. ... He continued to watch, learn, listen."

Jackson credited Rose for persevering when his career hit a rough spot.

"It's a great lesson for the young kids in America today, because when your opportunity comes, are you going to be ready or are you going to be so far with your back up against the wall and upset that it passes you by?" Jackson said. "He was a guy that stepped up and took full advantage."

Team president Donnie Walsh acquired Rose from Denver in a June 1996 trade.

"He came here with an awful lot of talent," Walsh said of Rose, who will be a free agent at the end of the season. "This award is because of the hard work he's put in and the patience. "We want to keep Jalen here. ... We'll do what we have to."

Rose had the same thought.

"I'd be lying if I said I want to change uniforms," he said. He credited his teammates for their support. "Those (teammates) are the guys who stuck with me as a player."

## Duncan needs 6 to 8 weeks to recover from knee surgery

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Tim Duncan of the San Antonio Spurs had surgery last week on his left knee, which had sidelined him as the defending NBA championships were eliminated in the first round of this year's playoffs.

The procedure, called a partial lateral meniscectomy, was deemed a success by team officials. Dr. David Schmidt, the team physician, performed the operation.

"It went great," said Spurs coach Gregg Popovich, adding that after about six to eight weeks of recovery Duncan should begin returning to "top-caliber play."

It was not immediately known whether Duncan would be able to participate

on the U.S. team in the Summer Olympics. Popovich said.

Duncan tore cartilage in his left knee on April 11 as he fell awkwardly after a dunk attempt in a game against the Sacramento Kings. He missed the final four games of the Spurs' regular season because of the injury, then missed all of San Antonio's playoff games. The Spurs, the 1999 NBA champions, lost to Phoenix in the first playoff round this year.

Medical tests last Tuesday revealed Duncan's injury had not healed on its own.

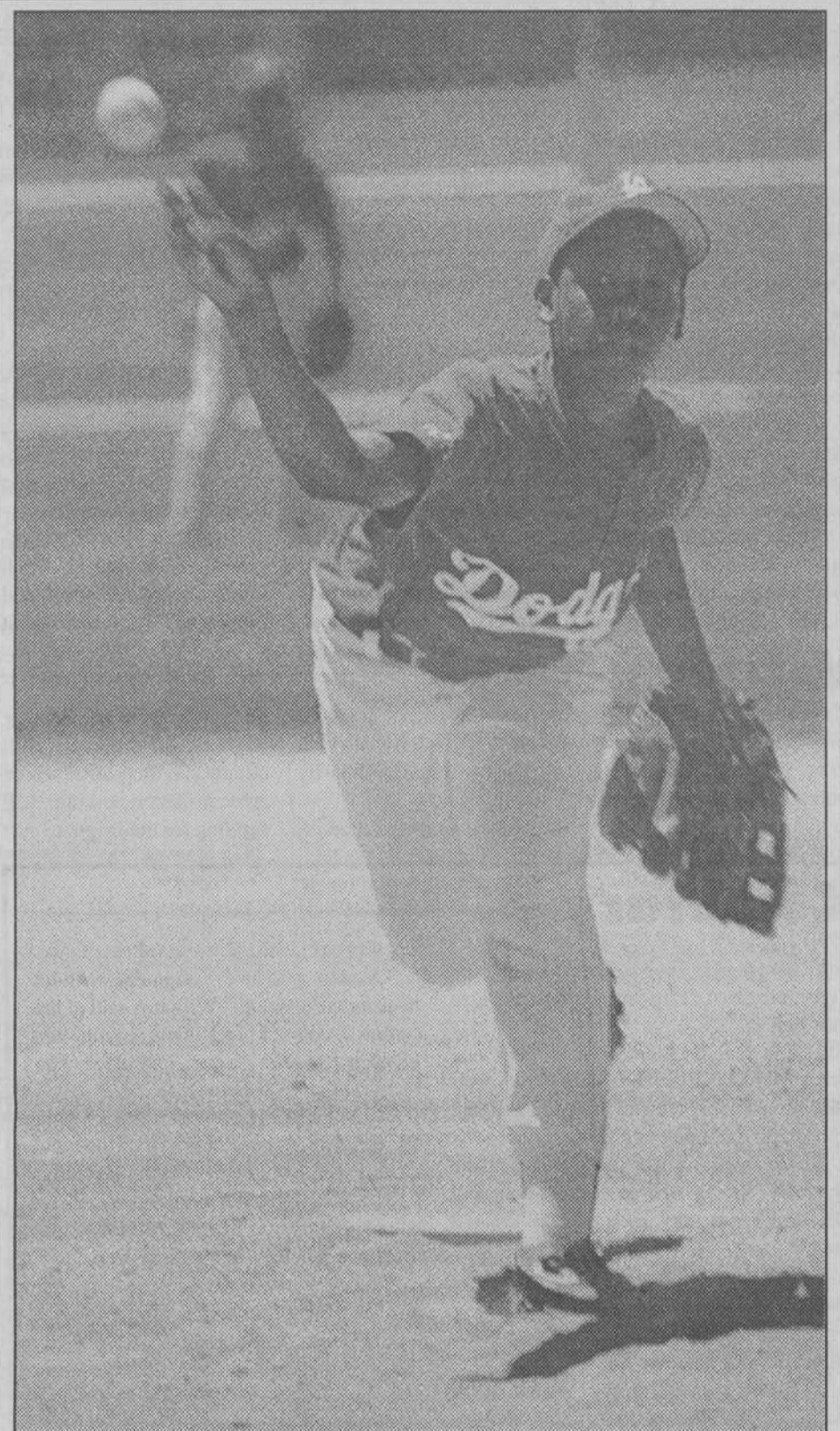
"He wants to play whole. It killed him sitting on the bench during the playoffs," Popovich said. "In an odd

sort of way, he's excited it (the surgery) is giving him some finality to this situation."

He is expected to be sidelined six to eight weeks, although the exact time frame won't be known until after he begins rehabilitation, the team said. Popovich

wouldn't say how the injury and the decision to operate may affect contract negotiations with Duncan.

"We all hope he'll be in San Antonio. But the bottom line is Tim Duncan wants to win, and I think his decision will have a lot to do with that," he said.



### ROGER DODGER

Right-hander Marcus Marshall hurls a pitch during a recent Community Baseball League game. Marshall plays for the Dodgers.

Sentinel-Voice photo by John Broussard

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