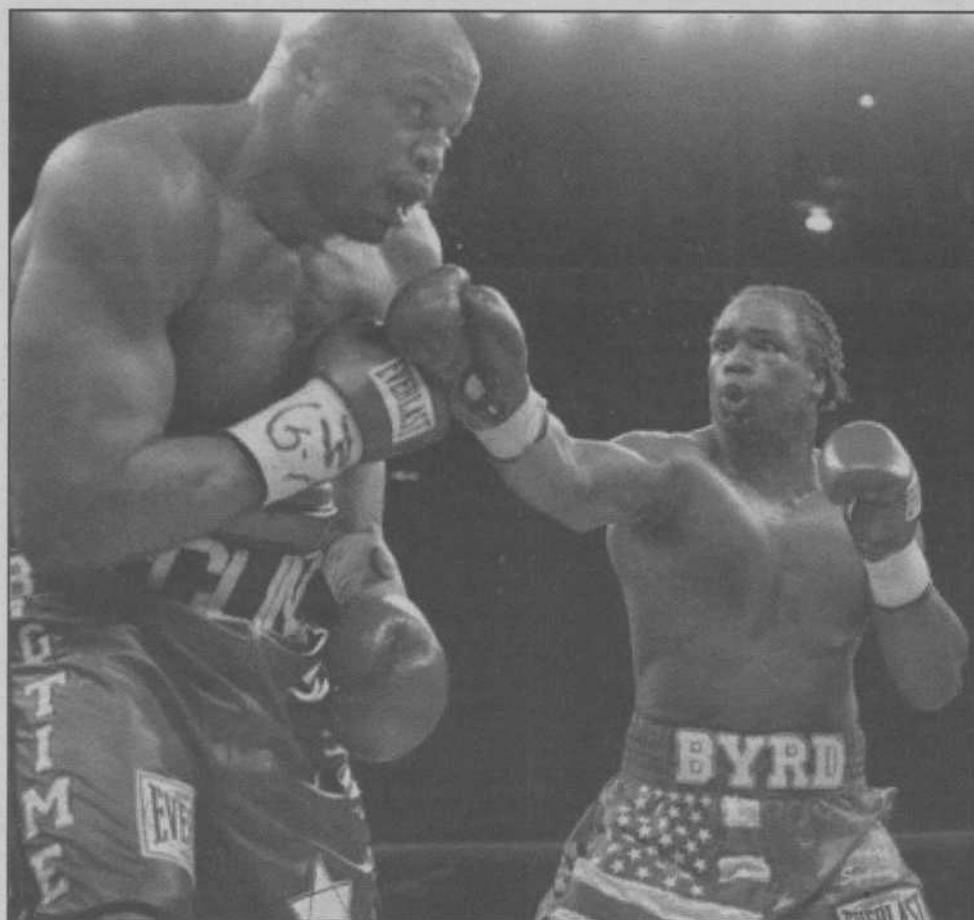


S P O R T S



Chris Byrd, right, punches Jameel McCline in the fourth round of their IBF heavyweight championship fight at New York's Madison Square Garden on Saturday. The defensive-minded Byrd overcame a knockdown to defeat the bigger, heavier McCline, by split decision.

Las Vegas Chris Byrd keeps version of heavyweight title

NEW YORK (AP) — Chris Byrd felt the power and found the canvas. Then Jameel McCline found out what made Byrd a heavyweight champion in the first place. Giving away 56 pounds and several inches, Byrd survived a second round knockdown and a bigger man's punch to retain his IBF heavyweight title Saturday night on a split decision by the narrowest of margins.

As crafty a fighter as the heavyweight division has seen in recent times, Byrd needed every bit of his skills to come on strong in the later rounds to win a split 12-round decision that was in doubt until the final judge's tally was added up.

The two good friends hugged as the highly entertaining fight ended and the crowd at Madison Square Garden stood and cheered. Byrd won by 115-112 and 114-113, while McCline was favored 114-112 on the third scorecard.

The Associated Press had Byrd ahead, 115-113.

"The way I fought back showed I am a true champion. I had to dig down. He weighed 270 pounds," Byrd said. "I definitely did enough to win the fight. I am a champion."

Byrd, who weighed 214 pounds to McCline's 270,

was in trouble early, going down in the second round from a right hand and taking punishment from an aggressive McCline. He was trailing badly after five rounds, before beginning to find his mark and score with quick inside combinations.

It was the third title defense for the southpaw Byrd, and the third fight that was close until the end. In his last fight, he retained the title with a draw over Andrew Golota.

"He has fast hands and he took me out of my game plan," McCline said. "That was the difference."

Also Saturday, Evander Holyfield was dominated once again, this time by journeyman Larry Donald, but refused to call it a career. At the age of 42, Holyfield lost almost every round to Donald and has now won only two of his last nine fights.

Holyfield's sad decline, meanwhile, continued when he was beaten soundly by Donald, a fighter that likely wouldn't have lasted six rounds during his prime.

Holyfield stood watching, unable to throw punches even when he saw openings, as Larry Donald jabbed his way to a lopsided 12-round decision that made the 42-year-old Holyfield's quest for the undisputed heavyweight title seem even more ridiculous

than it already was.

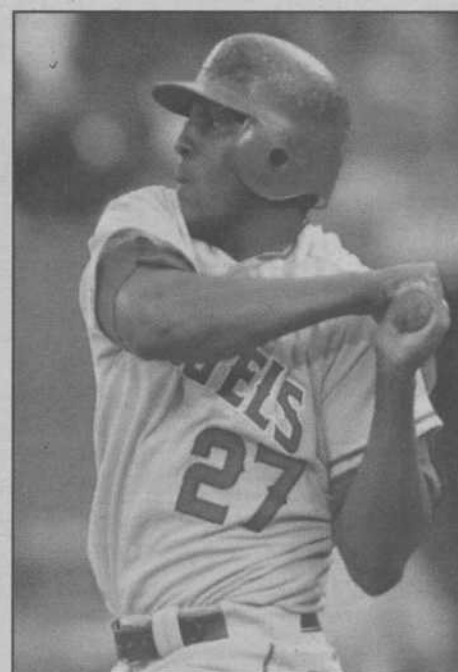
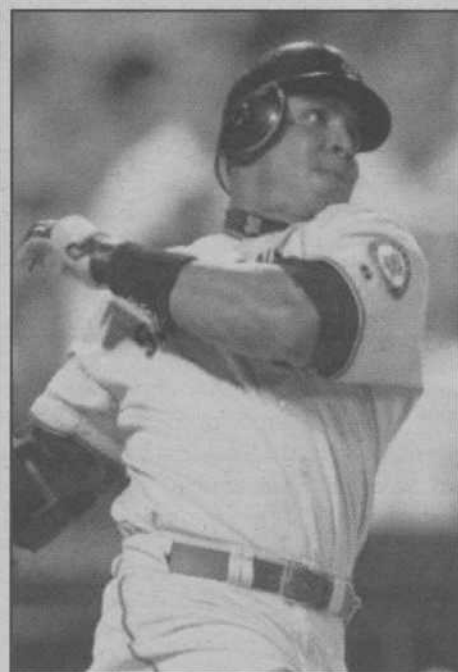
He refused to call it a career, but hinted that he may not fight much longer.

"In my mind I can't realistically think that it is over," Holyfield said. "But I have to look at the possibility that this is a permanent problem. If this is going to happen every fight I can't continue to do it."

Fighting for the first time since taking a beating last year from James Toney, Holyfield once resembled the fighter who won the heavyweight title four times only in physique. He fell down while throwing a left hook 49 seconds into the fight, setting the tone for what would be a long night.

Holyfield won only one round from each ringside judge, and in the final round Donald added insult to injury by dancing in front of him and slamming left jabs and rights off of his head.

In another fight, former heavyweight champion Hasim Rahman put himself in contention for one of the major titles by stopping an outclassed Kali Meehan after four rounds. Rahman never knocked Meehan down but was giving him such punishment at the end of the fourth round that Meehan's corner threw in the towel after the round ended.



BEST OF BOTH LEAGUES

Another record-setting season has led Barry Bonds to his fourth straight and unprecedented seventh overall National League Most Valuable Player Award. Bonds became the oldest winner of an MVP. Barry Bonds is hitting a home run against the Pittsburgh Pirates in Pittsburgh, in this Aug. 10 file photo.

Anaheim Angels' right fielder Vladimir Guerrero received 21 of the possible 28 first place votes to win the American League Most Valuable Player award. The New York Yankees Gary Sheffield finish second in voting. Guerrero hits a single to drive in two runs against the Toronto Blue Jays in this file image from Toronto on July 9.

Sports Pace

(Continued from Page 15) worth watching and investing.

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