

Holyfield beginning latest comeback

DALLAS (AP) - Evander Holyfield is 43. He hasn't fought in nearly two years, hasn't won in more than four, and hasn't been the heavyweight champ in six years. So?

Here's the timeline he considers more relevant: His contract to box for Don King expired about two weeks ago, he was licensed to box in Texas last week and, last Thursday, he announced the start of his latest comeback bid, an Aug. 18 fight against journeyman Jeremy Bates.

"I actually believe I can whup anybody," Holyfield said at a news conference featuring local fighters on the undercard, but not his opponent. "I'm ready. ...Sure as I sit here today, I will be the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world."

Now working for his own company, Real Deal Events, his return to the ring after a 21-month absence is being hyped as "Holyfield V, The Final Chapter."

Holyfield quickly notes there are many pages in a chapter — and this one won't end until he gets his fifth heavyweight title. He's already the only person ever to claim it four times.

"If this was one fight, it'd be the final page," Holyfield said. "Whatever it takes to fulfill that chapter, that's what it is."

Looking fit, albeit wearing a suit, Holyfield proudly said he hasn't stopped working out during the longest layoff of his career. He even joked it made him angry about having to pay people to train him without having a payday in sight.

"I was thinking, 'I'm doing all this work for nothing,'" he said, pretending to cry.

The layoff was caused by several things, starting with a three-bout losing skid, also the longest of his career, and

a 2-5-2 mark since 1999. His last loss, a unanimous decision that wasn't even close against Larry Donald in November 2004, prompted New York officials to revoke his boxing license because of "diminished skills and poor performance."

Holyfield received a medical suspension that blocked him from fighting anywhere in the country. It was later changed to a ban in the state of New York.

With his reputation reeling, fights were talked about but never finalized. Holyfield said King wasn't interested in anything less than a blockbuster, leaving him to "sit on the shelf."

Holyfield also said he believes bum shoulders have been behind his slide. He's had two operations on the left shoulder and one on the right, but never gave them enough time to heal, which only made it worse.

"I was stubborn," he said. "I was actually thinking I could handle the pain and beat these guys. I thought 60 percent of me was better than them. But they proved me wrong."

Now? "My arm can jump and bounce," he said, showing off a few moves.

Patrick Shaughnessy, spokesman for the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulations, said commissioners asked Holyfield for the results of four tests, two because of his age. He passed them all and received his license June 21.

It's good for a year, but must be renewed each time he fights. The caliber of the competition is always factored in — Bates, 32, is 21-11-1 with 18 KOs.

"We are confident that this is a fight he is capable of making based on his age, ability and opponent," Shaughnessy said.

Holyfield could've easily walked away rich, healthy and with his legacy intact as an overachiever, albeit one who might've hung on too long. Now he risks the long goodbye being more of the memory.

"I could just go into acting because so many people want me to be this action hero," he said. "But I say, no, I'm not finished. I got to finish this. I was brought up, when you start something, you've got to finish. And you've got to finish better than you start."

He also invoked the inevitable comparison to George Foreman, whose popularity Holyfield helped spur by beating him — barely — when Foreman was 42 and Holyfield was 28 and in his prime.

Holyfield believes his comeback can be as popular as Foreman's was in the early 1990s.

"When I become heavyweight champion of the world again, all these people in their 40s and older are going to say, 'I better get me a goal. I'm going to have some

fun, too,'" he said. "If somebody made you feel like your age is stopping you from doing something and you know that you have the skill and the will to work and do it, then there ain't no problem."

Holyfield said he looks as good as anyone 23 or 24, but acknowledges lacking the energy to make up for any mistakes in the ring. However, he believes experience can prevent him from making mistakes.

"I'm going to prove I'm the same guy that used to get \$20 million because I'm hop-

ing someday to get a \$100 million fight," he said. "I'm willing to pay the price that's necessary to be the very best I can be."

The fight, which is on a Friday night, will be televised by Fox Sports Net.

Holyfield trains in Houston, which is why he picked Dallas for his return. He said Houstonians are too accustomed to seeing him.

"In Dallas, it's like going to your cousin's," he said, laughing. "Hey, cuz, I haven't seen you in a long time."

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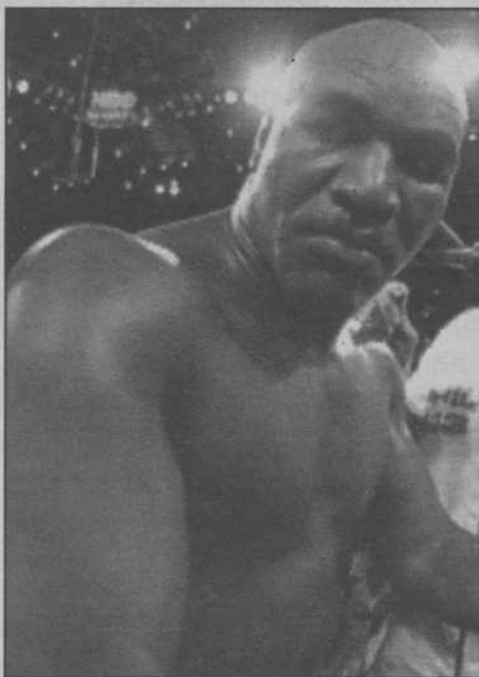
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On the title hunt: Former undisputed world cruiserweight champion and four-time world heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield recently announced plans to take another shot at winning the world heavyweight championship.

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