

Mike Tyson Biography

Synopsis

Born in Brooklyn, New York, on June 30, 1966, Mike Tyson became the youngest heavyweight-boxing champion of the world in 1986, at age 20. He lost the title in 1990 and later served three years in prison over rape charges. He subsequently earned further notoriety by biting Evander Holyfield's ear during a rematch in 1997. Tyson has gone on to appear in several films, including a documentary on his life.

Early Life

Michael Gerard Tyson was born on June 30, 1966, in Brooklyn, New York, to parents Jimmy Kirkpatrick and Lorna Tyson. When Michael was two years old his father abandoned the family, leaving Lorna to care for Michael and his two siblings, Rodney and Denise. Struggling financially, the Tyson family moved to Brownsville, Brooklyn, a neighborhood known for its high crime.

Small and shy, Tyson was often the target of bullying. To combat this, he began developing his own style of street fighting, which ultimately transitioned into criminal activity. His gang, known as the Jolly Stompers, assigned him to clean out cash registers while older members held victims at gunpoint. He was only 11 years old at the time. He frequently ran into trouble with police over his petty criminal activities, and by the age of 13, he had been arrested more than 30 times.

Tyson's bad behavior landed him in the Tryon School for Boys, a reform school in upstate New York. At Tryon, Tyson met counselor Bob Stewart, who had been an amateur boxing champion. Tyson wanted Stewart to teach him how to use his fists. Stewart reluctantly agreed, on the condition that Mike would stay out of trouble and work harder in school. Previously classified as learning disabled, Mike managed to raise his reading abilities to the seventh-grade level in a matter of months. He also became determined to learn everything he could about boxing, often slipping out of bed after curfew to practice punches in the dark.

In 1980, Stewart felt he had taught Tyson all he knew. He introduced the aspiring boxer to legendary boxing manager Constantine "Cus" D'Amato, who had a gym in Catskill, New York. D'Amato was known for taking personal interest in promising fighters, even providing them room and board in the home he shared with companion Camille Ewald. He had handled the careers of several successful boxers, including Floyd Patterson and Jose Torres, and he immediately recognized Tyson's promise as a heavyweight contender, telling him, "If you want to stay here, and if you want to listen, you could be the world heavyweight champion someday." Tyson agreed to stay.

The relationship between D'Amato and Tyson was more than that of a professional trainer and a boxer—it was also one of a father and son. D'Amato took Tyson under his wing, and when the 14-year-old was paroled from Tryon in September 1980, he entered into D'Amato's full-time custody. D'Amato set a rigorous training schedule for the young athlete, sending him to Catskill High School during the day and training in the ring every evening. D'Amato also entered Tyson in amateur boxing matches and "smokers," or non-sanctioned fights, in order to teach the teen how to deal with older opponents.

Tyson's life seemed to be looking up, but in 1982, he suffered several personal losses. That year, Tyson's mother died of cancer. "I never saw my mother happy with me and proud of me for doing something," he later told reporters. "She only knew of me as being a wild kid running the streets, coming home with new clothes that she knew I didn't pay for. I never got a chance to talk to her or know about her. Professionally, it has no effect, but it's crushing emotionally and personally." Around this same time, Tyson was expelled from Catskill High for his erratic, often violent behavior.

Tyson continued his schooling through private tutors while he trained for the 1984 Olympic trials. Tyson's showing in the trials, however, did not promise great success; he lost to the eventual gold medalist, Henry Tillman. After failing to make the Olympic team, D'Amato decided that it was time for his fighter to turn professional. The trainer conceived a game plan that would result in breaking the heavyweight championship for Tyson before the young man's 21st birthday, breaking the record originally set by Floyd Patterson.

Early Career

On March 6, 1985, Tyson made his professional debut in Albany, New York, against Hector Mercedes. The 18-year-old knocked Mercedes out in one round. Tyson's strength, quick fists and his notable defensive abilities intimidated his opponents, who were often afraid to hit the fighter. This gave Tyson the uncanny ability to level his opponents in only one round, and earned him the nickname "Iron Mike."

The year was a successful one for Tyson, but it was not without its tragedies. On November 4, 1985, D'Amato died of pneumonia. Tyson was rocked by the death of the man he considered his surrogate father. Boxing trainer Kevin Rooney took over D'Amato's coaching duties and, less than two weeks later, Tyson continued on the path that D'Amato had laid out for him. He recorded his thirteenth knockout in Houston, Texas, and dedicated the fight to D'Amato. Although he seemed to recover well from D'Amato's passing, those close to Tyson say that the boxer never fully recovered from the loss. Many attributed the boxer's future behavior to the loss of the man that had previously grounded and supported him.

By 1986, at the age of 20, Tyson had garnered a 22-0 record—21 of the fights won by knockout. On November 22, 1986, Tyson finally reached his goal: He was given his first title fight against Trevor Berbick for the World Boxing Council heavyweight championship. Tyson won the title by a knockout in the second round. At the age of 20 years and four months, he beat Patterson's record, becoming the youngest heavyweight champion in history.

Tyson's success in the ring didn't stop there. He defended his title against James Smith on March 7, 1987, adding the World Boxing Association championship to his list of victories. On August 1 he became the first heavyweight to own all three major boxing belts when he won the International Boxing Federation title from Tony Tucker.

Marriage and Arrests

Tyson's rise from childhood delinquent to boxing champ put him at the center of the media's attentions. Met with sudden fame, Tyson began partying hard and stepping out with various Hollywood stars. Around this time, Tyson set his sights on television actress Robin Givens. The couple began dating, and on February 7, 1988, he and Givens married in New York.

But Tyson's game seemed to be on the decline, and after several close calls in the ring, it became clear that the boxer's edge was slipping. Once known for his complicated offensive and defensive moves, Tyson seemed to continually rely on his one-punch knockout move to finish his bouts. The boxer blamed his long-time trainer, Rooney, for his struggle in the ring and fired him in mid 1988.

As his game was falling apart, so was Tyson's marriage to Givens. Allegations of spousal abuse began to surface in the media in June of 1988, and Givens and her mother demanded access to Tyson's money for a down payment on a \$3 million home in New Jersey. That same year, police were called to Tyson's home after he began throwing furniture out of the window and forced Givens and her mother to leave the home.

That summer, Tyson also found himself in court with manager Bill Cayton, in an effort to break their contract. By July 1988, Cayton had settled out of court, agreeing to reduce his share from one-third to 20 percent of Tyson's purses. Soon after, Tyson struck up a partnership with boxing promoter Don King. The move seemed like a step in the right direction for the boxer, but his life was spiraling out of control both in and out of the ring.

Tyson's behavior during this time became increasingly violent and erratic. In August 1988, he broke a bone in his right hand after a 4 a.m. street brawl with professional fighter Mitch Green. The next month, Tyson was knocked unconscious after driving his BMW into a tree at D'Amato's home. Tabloids later claimed the accident was a

suicide attempt brought on from excessive drug use. He was fined \$200 and sentenced to community service for speeding.

Later that September, Givens and Tyson appeared in an interview with Barbara Walters in which Givens described her marriage as "pure hell." Shortly thereafter, she announced that she was filing for divorce. Tyson countersued for a divorce and an annulment, beginning an ugly months-long court process.

This was just the beginning of Tyson's struggles with women. In late 1988, Tyson was sued for his inappropriate attentions toward two nightclub patrons, Sandra Miller and Lori Davis. The women sued Tyson for allegedly forcefully grabbing, propositioning and insulting them while out dancing.

On February 14, 1989, Tyson's split with Givens became official.

Imprisonment and Return to Boxing

Tyson stepped back into the ring with British boxer Frank Bruno in an effort to retain his world heavyweight title. Tyson went on to knock out Bruno in the fifth round, and keep his status as world champ. On July 21, 1989, Tyson defended his title again, knocking out Carl "The Truth" Williams in one round. Tyson's winning streak came to an end on February 11, 1990, however, when he lost his championship belt to boxer Buster Douglas in Tokyo, Japan. Tyson, the clear favorite, sent Douglas to the mat in the eighth round, but Douglas came back in the tenth, knocking Tyson out for the first time in his career.

Discouraged but not ready to give up, Tyson recovered by knocking out Olympic gold medalist—and former amateur boxing adversary—Henry Tillman later that year. In another bout, he defeated Alex Stewart by a knockout in the first round. But Tyson lost his fight in court on November 1, 1990, when a New York City civil jury sided with Sandra Miller for the barroom incident of 1988. Then in July of 1991, Tyson was accused of raping Desiree Washington, a Miss Black American contestant. On March 26, 1992, after nearly a year of trial proceedings, Tyson was found guilty on one count of rape and two counts of deviant sexual conduct. Because of Indiana state laws, Tyson was ordered to serve six years in prison, effective immediately. Tyson initially handled his stint in prison poorly, and was found guilty of threatening a guard while in prison, adding 15 days to his sentence. That same year, Tyson's father died. The boxer didn't request leave to attend the funeral. While imprisoned, Tyson converted to Islam, and adopted the name Malik Abdul Aziz. On March 25, 1995, after serving three years of his sentence, Tyson was released from the Indiana Youth Center near Plainfield, Indiana. Already planning his comeback, Tyson arranged his next fight with Peter McNeeley in Las Vegas, Nevada. On August 19, 1995, Tyson won the fight, knocking out McNeeley in just 89 seconds.

Tyson also won his next match in December 1995, knocking out Buster Mathis Jr. in the third round.

Holyfield Fight

After his personal and professional setbacks, Tyson seemed to be making a positive change in his life. After several successful fights, Tyson came head-to-head with his next big challenger: Evander Holyfield. Holyfield had been promised a title shot against Tyson in 1990, but before that fight could occur Douglas defeated Tyson. Instead of fighting Tyson, Holyfield fought Douglas for the heavyweight title. Douglas lost by knockout on October 25, 1990, making Holyfield the new undefeated, undisputed heavyweight champion of the world.

On November 9, 1996, Tyson faced Holyfield for the heavyweight title. The evening would not end successfully for Tyson, who lost to Holyfield by a knockout in the 11th round. Instead of Tyson's anticipated victory, Holyfield made history by becoming the second person to win a heavyweight championship belt three times. Tyson claimed he was the victim of multiple illegal head butts by Holyfield, and vowed to avenge his loss.

Tyson trained heavily for a rematch with Holyfield, and on June 28, 1997, the two boxers faced off yet again. The fight was televised on pay-per-view and entered nearly 2 million households, setting a record at the time for the highest number of paid television viewers. Both boxers also received record purses for the match, making them the highest-paid professional boxers in history until 2007. The first and second rounds provided the typical crowd-pleasing action expected from the two champions. But the fight took an unexpected turn in the third round of the match. Tyson shocked fans and boxing officials when he grabbed Holyfield and bit both of the boxer's ears, completely severing a piece of Holyfield's right ear. Tyson claimed that the action was retaliation for Holyfield's illegal head butts from their previous match. Judges didn't agree with Tyson's reasoning, however, and disqualified the boxer from the match.

On July 9, 1997, the Nevada State Athletic Commission revoked Tyson's boxing license in a unanimous voice vote, and fined the boxer \$3 million for biting Holyfield. No longer able to fight, Tyson was aimless and unmoored. Several months later, Tyson was dealt another blow when he was ordered to pay boxer Mitch Green \$45,000 for his 1988 street-fighting incident. Shortly after the court ruling, Tyson landed in the hospital after his motorcycle skidded out of control on a ride through Connecticut. The former boxer broke a rib and punctured a lung.

Don King Lawsuit, Lewis Fight and Retirement

Tyson landed in court yet again, this time in 1998 as a plaintiff. On March 5, 1998, the boxer filed a \$100 million lawsuit in U.S. District Court in New York against Don King, accusing the promoter of cheating him out of millions of dollars. He also filed a lawsuit against his former managers Rory Holloway and John Horne, claiming they made King Tyson's exclusive promoter without the boxer's knowledge. King and Tyson settled out of court for \$14 million. Tyson allegedly lost millions in the process.

In the wake of several more lawsuits, including another sexual harassment trial and a \$22 million suit filed by Rooney for wrongful termination, Tyson struggled to reinstate his boxing license. In July 1998, the boxer reapplied for his boxing license in New Jersey, but later withdrew his application before the board could meet to discuss his case. A few weeks later, in yet another outburst, Tyson assaulted two motorists after a car accident in Maryland dented his Mercedes.

In October 1998, Tyson's boxing license was reinstated. Tyson was back in the ring only a few months before he plead no contest for his attack on the motorists in Maryland. The judge sentenced Tyson to two concurrent two-year sentences for the assault, but was given only one year of jail time, a \$5,000 fine and 200 hours of community service. He was released after serving nine months, and went straight back into the ring.

The next several years were marred with more accusations of physical assaults, sexual harassment, and public incidents. Then, in 2000, a random drug test revealed that Tyson had been smoking marijuana. The results caused boxing officials to penalize Tyson by declaring his victory against boxer Andrew Golota a loss. His next highly publicized fight would be in 2002 with WBC, IBF and IBO champion Lennox Lewis. Tyson was once again fighting for the heavyweight championship, and the match was a very personal one. Tyson made several remarks to Lewis before the fight, including a threat to "eat his children." At a January press conference, the two boxers began a brawl that threatened to cancel the match, but the fight was eventually scheduled for June of that year. Tyson lost the fight by a knockout, and the defeat signaled the decline of the former champion's career. After losing several more fights throughout 2003 and 2005, Tyson announced his retirement.

Personal Life

Tyson also suffered in his personal life around this time. After six years of marriage, second wife Monica Turner filed for divorce in 2003, on grounds of adultery. That same year, he filed for bankruptcy after his exorbitant spending, multiple trials and

bad investments caught up with him. In an attempt to pay off his debts, Tyson stepped back into the ring for a series of exhibition fights.

To curb expenses, the boxer also sold his upscale mansion in Farmington, Connecticut, to rapper 50 Cent for a little more than \$4 million. He crashed on friends' couches and slept in shelters until he landed in Phoenix, Arizona. There, in 2005, he purchased a home in Paradise Valley for \$2.1 million, which he financed by endorsing products and making cameos on television and in boxing exhibitions. But Tyson's hard-partying ways caught up with him again in late 2006. Tyson was arrested in Scottsdale, Arizona, after nearly crashing into a police SUV. Suspected of driving while intoxicated, police pulled Tyson over and searched his car. During the search, the police discovered cocaine and drug paraphernalia throughout the vehicle. On September 24, 2007, Mike Tyson pleaded guilty to possession of narcotics and driving under the influence. He was sentenced to 24 hours in jail, 360 hours of community service and three years' probation.

Tyson's life seemed to mellow over the next few years, and the boxer began seeking sobriety by attending Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings. But in 2009, Tyson was dealt another blow when his 4-year-old daughter, Exodus, accidentally strangled herself on a treadmill cord in her mother's Phoenix home. The tragedy marked yet another dark period in Tyson's troubled life. Tyson is the father of seven known children—Gena, Rayna, Amir, D'Amato Kilrain, Mikey Lorna, Miguel Leon and Exodus—with multiple women, some of whom continue to remain anonymous to the media.

Recent Projects and Problems

In 2009, Tyson returned to the spotlight with a cameo in the hit comedy *The Hangover* with Bradley Cooper. He married for a third time that same year, walking down the aisle with Lakiha "Kiki" Spicer. The couple has two children together, daughter Milan and son Morocco.

The success of his appearance as himself in *The Hangover* seemed to open the door to more acting opportunities, including guest appearances on such television series as *Entourage*, *How I Met Your Mother* and *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*. In 2012, Tyson made his Broadway debut in his one-man show *Mike Tyson: The Undisputed Truth* directed by Spike Lee.

Tyson, however, acknowledged that he was once again battling substance abuse problems the following year. In August 2013, he revealed in an interview with *Today* host Matt Lauer that "When I start drinking and I relapse, I think of dying. When I'm in a real dark mood, I think of dying. And I don't want to be around no more. I won't survive unless I get help." This revelation came while Tyson was reinventing himself as a boxing promoter. He also told Lauer that he had only been

sober for 12 days at the time of the interview. After so many personal and professional ups and downs, it is unclear what will happen next for this legendary yet troubled sports figure.

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