

Like its subject, Mike Tyson's autobiography is fascinating but flawed.

Mike Tyson: Undisputed Truth

Tommy Brooks, who trained Mike Tyson briefly late in the fighter's career, told Mike, "Man, you're going to be in a wheelchair and people are still going to be wondering what you're up to."

Tyson's autobiography—*Undisputed Truth* written with Larry Sloman (Blue Rider Press)—helps satisfy that curiosity.

The book's title is a misnomer since some of what Tyson says in it is very much in dispute. For example, one can believe or disbelieve Mike when he states that he didn't rape Desiree Washington and that his conviction was a miscarriage of justice. I've come around to the view that, in Tyson's mind, he was innocent of the charge. But a twelve-person jury disagreed with his version of events.

That said; *Undisputed Truth* is worth the read.

The book begins with a chilling re-creation of the depraved and degrading environment that Tyson came from. He grew up in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn surrounded by violence. For many of his childhood years, the family (which consisted of Mike, his mother, brother, and sister) lived in abandoned buildings. His biological father, who sired seventeen children by various women, was absent.

Tyson began drinking at age ten and using cocaine at eleven. He slept in the same bed with his mother until he was in his teens, sometimes with one of her lovers beside them.

Much of the book is a recitation of the craziness and exploration of personages that the world already knows: Cus D'Amato, Don King, the managerial team of Jimmy Jacobs and Bill Cayton, Robin Givens, Desiree Washington, and others. There's Mike biting Evander Holyfield's ear and his self-justification because Holyfield had repeatedly headbutted him.

The most vivid portrait is of the man whom one might call Tyson's "creator"—Cus D'Amato.

"Cus wanted the meanest fighter that God ever created," Tyson says. "Someone who scared the life out of people before they even entered the

ring. I was the perfect guy for his mission; broken home, unloved, and destitute; hard and strong and sneaky. He trained me to be totally ferocious, in the ring and out. To Cus, my opponents were food. Nourishment. Something you had to eat to live.”

There’s a lot of graphic sex in *Undisputed Truth*—with prostitutes, with groupies, and in adult clubs.

Tyson admits to having been a substance abuser for most his life and calls himself a “quintessential addict.” After beating Trevor Berbick to win the WBC heavyweight crown, he was featured in a “just say no to drugs” television and print-advertisement campaign. At the same time, he was using drugs and financing a crack enterprise in Brownsville.

“Jimmy [Jacobs] and Bill [Cayton] were intent on stripping away all the Brownsville from me and giving me a positive image,” he notes. “But I was a fake fucking Uncle Tom nigga. I felt like a trained monkey. I didn’t become champ of the world to be a submissive nice guy. They wanted me to be a hero, but I wanted to be a villain.”

Regarding his three-year incarceration after a jury found him guilty of rape, Tyson acknowledges, “Prison doesn’t rehabilitate anyone. It debilitates you. I don’t care how much money you earn when you get out, you’re still a lesser person than when you went in. Prison took the whole life out of me.”

And there’s the financial fleecing of Tyson at every level; by his women, by Don King, and by others he trusted. There are people who hustled Mike and he still doesn’t know it. The ultimate irony might be that Mike Tyson, who came from the streets, didn’t have street smarts.

Undisputed Truth is infused with self-loathing.

Tyson references himself as “stupid . . . wretched . . . a miserable person . . . a selfish pig . . . a bum . . . a sewage rat . . . an ignorant monster . . . a piece of shit.”

Among the thoughts he shares are, “My baseline normal is to destroy myself . . . You could put me in any city in any country and I’d gravitate to the darkest cesspool . . . My social skills consisted of putting a guy in a coma . . . I had the biggest loser friends in the history of loser friends . . . I couldn’t understand why anyone would want to be with me . . . There’s no doubt that I have some self-hatred issues . . . Sometimes I don’t know if I was even made for life.”

Sloman put a lot of time and effort into *Undisputed Truth*. The book is 580 pages long and clearly the product of a huge amount of work.

Tyson's voice is nicely captured in the early chapters. But about halfway through, there are places where the book begins to sound more like a collaborator piecing together newspaper articles and other public sources than Tyson himself.

The narrative is remarkably compelling at times. But there are also a lot of nagging errors that fact checking should have discovered and corrected.

For example, Big Fights Inc was created and, for decades, wholly-owned by Bill Cayton, who hired Jimmy Jacobs as a salaried employee. The book misstates that the company was formed by both men. HBO commentator Barry Tompkins is referred to as "Barry Watkins." Bobby Czyz did not "beat the shit" out of Evander Holyfield before Evander stopped him in round ten. In the real world, Evander was ahead in the fight when Czyz retired on his stool after five rounds.

More significantly, most of the mea culpas in *Undisputed Truth* relate to misdeeds that the world already knows about. There are some unexplored issues that Mike doesn't deal with.

Over the years, Tyson has talked at length about having read Plato, Tolstoy, Shakespeare, and others. Perhaps he should read Ovid, the Roman poet, who lived from 43 BC to 18 AD and wrote, "It is the privilege of beasts to rage about furiously. It is the duty of man to control himself."

One of the saddest things about Tyson's life is that all the craziness has obscured how good a fighter he was when he was young.

Talking about "boxing Gods" like Jack Johnson, Jack Dempsey, and Joe Louis, Tyson declares, "I was never really one of those guys. I wish I was, but I wasn't."

He could have been.