



## Local Fight Coverage with Briggs Seekins Mike Tyson at Turning Stone

I've covered in other columns how the ongoing oppression of professional mixed martial arts in New York State robs the Southern Tier and central New York of many terrific potential fight cards. Syracuse and Binghamton could both provide valid sites for a nationally televised Bellator Fighting card.

Fortunately the situation in boxing is far more robust. Located within a modest drive of the *National Police Gazette* distribution area, Turning Stone Casino in Verona has fashioned itself into a premiere venue for world championship boxing. In the past year, six nationally televised boxing cards have been broadcast from the Oneida Nation's casino and resort.

I was there on September 1, 2012, when WBA middleweight champion Gennady Golovkin of Kazakhstan made his U.S. Debut, demolishing European champion Grzegorz Proksa of Poland. Golovkin, now 27-0 with 25 KOs, is the hottest fighter in the sport and in boxing terms, his appearance at Turning Stone might end up being bigger than the Beatles on the Ed Sullivan show.

In August, Turning Stone once again provided the terrain for boxing history, as former world heavyweight champion Mike Tyson made a triumphant return to the sport in the role of promoter, as Iron Mike Productions presented their inaugural card on the season finale of ESPN2's Friday Night Fights.

Tyson is the most iconic boxer of the past 30 years, a colorful and larger-than-life superstar with tragically mortal flaws. His dramatic ascendance to the pinnacle of the sport in the 1980s, when he was barely out of his teens, remains one of the great chapters in the history of boxing lore. But in the years since, his public meltdowns and criminal transgressions have made him a TMZ-style celebrity sideshow.

It was the good Mike on hand to host the show last month at Turning Stone. Tyson attended public events and interacted with fans throughout the week leading up to fight night. At a Wednesday afternoon press conference, he refused to wrap things up when the emcee attempted to intervene and continued to take questions for another 20 minutes. Then he took pictures with fans for another 45 minutes as he made his way out of the showroom.

Fight night itself was the same thing: Iron Mike surrounded by fans, shaking hands and cracking jokes, and all the time smiling for photos. At the post-fight press conference on Friday night, Tyson told reporters, "I've just been giggly all week."

A Mike Tyson press conference is always a big event in the boxing world. Tyson is the kind of guy who could answer the same question five times and give you five completely different, possibly contradictory, and 100 percent quote-worthy answers every single time. Each answer will be fundamentally honest, in the manner that the id is fundamentally honest. Along with an extremely generous helping of fast-twitch muscle fiber, the Gods favored Tyson with the gift of gab. He is an eloquent, and seemingly unfiltered, talker. It's not surprising that Tyson has made a smashing success of his one-man show.

During the post-fight press conference, Tyson discoursed on the upstate New York boxing history, mentioning John Sullivan's 1881 battle with John Flood, on a barge anchored in the Hudson river near Hastings, a fight covered extensively at the time by the *National Police Gazette*.

Tyson always discusses his notorious past with the media in what seems like an open and revealing manner. "I've been on the verge of dying," he said at the presser. "I'm a vicious alcoholic."

He then casually dropped what was really something of a bombshell, confessing that he had only actually been sober for six days, even though being in recovery has been a big part of his recent public image. "I've been lying to a lot of people," Tyson admitted.

Tyson succeeded in a promoter's most important task: presenting exciting fights to the paying fans. The two televised fights were probably the two-fight combination broadcast on a Friday Night Fights episode all season long. Jesus Andres Cueller of Argentina captured the vacant interim WBA featherweight title by forcing the talented and previously unbeaten Claudio Marrero into an uncomfortable brawl that left fans on their feet and cheering all night long. In the evening's main event, IBF junior lightweight champion Argenis Mendez re-

tained his title via a majority draw against hard-nosed Arash Usmanee.

I would not be surprised to see Iron Mike Productions return to Turning Stone in the future. And with or without Iron Mike, Southern Tier fight fans should seriously consider the short pilgrimage anytime the Oneida Nation sanctions a card. Exciting boxing action is always a more sure bet at Turning Stone than any of the games of chance up for offer on the casino floor.

## LUPARDO BLAMES WOMEN FOR DEAD MMA BILL

In an exclusive interview with the *Police Gazette* New York State Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo put the blame for the state's inability to legalize pro MMA squarely at the feet of the state assembly's women's caucus and the women's interest groups that influence them. "I'm Vice-Chair of the Legislative Women's Caucus," Lupardo told us, "and I couldn't even change their minds."

Lupardo supports legalizing pro MMA bouts in the state and was a co-sponsor of the most recent bill. She believes there's nothing to the rumor that labor-union influence killed the bill. She feels the more likely cause is an inside-Albany game of revenge. Lupardo told us the women's caucus was very displeased with the way Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver handled the sexual harassment scandal involving Assemblyman Vito Lopez. Lopez resigned in May, but nerves are still raw. As a result, the assemblywomen, under pressure from women's lobby groups—according to Lupardo—are steadfastly against supporting legalization.

New York is now the only state in the nation that outlaws professional mixed-martial-arts matches. MMA's supporters bemoan the loss of revenue to local communities that are struggling to find ways to improve economically, while other states get a head start in establishing fight venues and business relationships. Much is made of the fact that it is illegal for local hero Jon Jones to ply his trade in his home state.

When asked if it might just take a cooling-off period for things to change, Lupardo replied, "I hope so!" There is nothing happening presently on the bill, but Lupardo is confident in its ultimate passage—and has no doubt Governor Cuomo would sign it if it reached his desk. "It's only a matter of when," she said, "not if."

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