

**Iron Man, from
neck to toe: In
fighting form**

He's Back

Sports: After three years in prison, where he read voraciously and converted to Islam, Mike Tyson is returning to the ring. He says he's ready. Are you?

By JOHN SEDGWICK AND ALLISON SAMUELS

AFTER MIKE TYSON EMERGED FROM THE medium-security prison called the Indiana Youth Center last March, he slipped into Don King's stretch limo for a ride to a nearby mosque, where he gave thanks to his new god, Allah. Then he boarded a plane bound for his 90-acre compound in Southington, Ohio—and substituted a whole new prison for the old one.

Despite the words MIKE TYSON adorning the flamboyant iron gate, the Southington spread is not exactly Mike. Flanked by waterfalls and duck ponds, the sprawling mansion rises out of the scarecrow-studded cornfields like a mirage. This is Amish country, 45 minutes outside Cleveland. Tyson moved here to be near Don King, the wily, electric-haired boxing promoter who has engineered Tyson's much-ballyhooed return to the ring in Las Vegas on Aug. 19, against Peter McNeeley. King's wife, in fact, did the decoration: the three-room

clothes closet for his 100 pairs of sneakers, the little-used indoor pool shaped like a boxing glove, the white baby grand piano. Although he grew up with nothing, Tyson is not entirely comfortable being Richie Rich. He gravitates to the den, with its wall-to-wall TV, and its collection of X-Men dolls from the Saturday-morning TV show Tyson loves. "They're superheroes," he explains, "and they're cool."

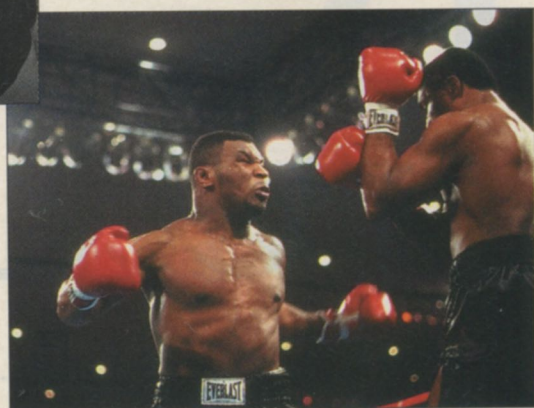
Tyson has packed the house with highly paid assistants, including his former cellmate David Barnes, but he still acts starved for company. "Do you want anything? Ice cream?" he eagerly asks a reporter who has come to see him. Big and brawny, with eyes that can go hard or soft, he looks disappointed when she says no. He still keeps some flowers and balloons, now wilted and shrunken, sent him by celebrity friends like Whitney Houston, Spike Lee and Shaquille O'Neal for his 29th birthday, although that was weeks ago. "I don't want to throw them away," Tyson says in his lisping, little-boy voice. "They are from friends, good friends, so I want them around."

It's a lonely time for Iron Mike, who broke out of the Brooklyn projects to become, at 20, the youngest heavyweight champion in history, and then to captivate the nation with his coming-at-you fighting style—both in the ring and out. As every boxer knows, it's always the punch you don't see coming that knocks you out. And he was KO'd in 1992 by an unlikely combination of a wispy 18-year-old beauty-pag-eant contestant named Desiree Washington and a Hoosier jury that, despite the dismissal of similar charges against William Kennedy Smith, believed that Tyson's grubby lovemaking with Washington in his Indianapolis hotel room constituted rape. Tyson remains unrepentant. Although he could have been released a year early if he'd admitted to the crime, he did a full three-year stretch and is appealing his conviction. "I didn't rape that girl," he insists. "But I did put myself in that position [of leaving himself open to a rape charge]. I take responsibility for that."

While some had doubted that Tyson would ever box again, he has come out of prison eager to return to the ring, which may be the only place he feels fully liberated. In taking on McNeeley, a little-regarded journeyman, he appears to face little threat. "We are starting him out slow so we can see what's going on," King explains. "But after McNeeley we'll go to the next level." The Showtime cable network is banking on that: it has teamed with the MGM Grand hotel to buy the rights to Tyson's next six fights for a record \$35 million-plus, with other financial arrangements that could, by some accounts, swell Tyson's take to well over \$100 million—and put him on

Trying to Put His Life Together

After Tyson suffered serious personal and professional setbacks, some people doubted he would ever box again. But the ring may be the only place he feels fully liberated.



Toning up his body, his mind and his image: *In upstate New York (1985) with D'Amato (clockwise from top left), riding with Givens (1989), taking out Berbick for the heavyweight crown (1986) and meeting the press last week in Las Vegas with McNeeley and King*

the road to becoming a billionaire.

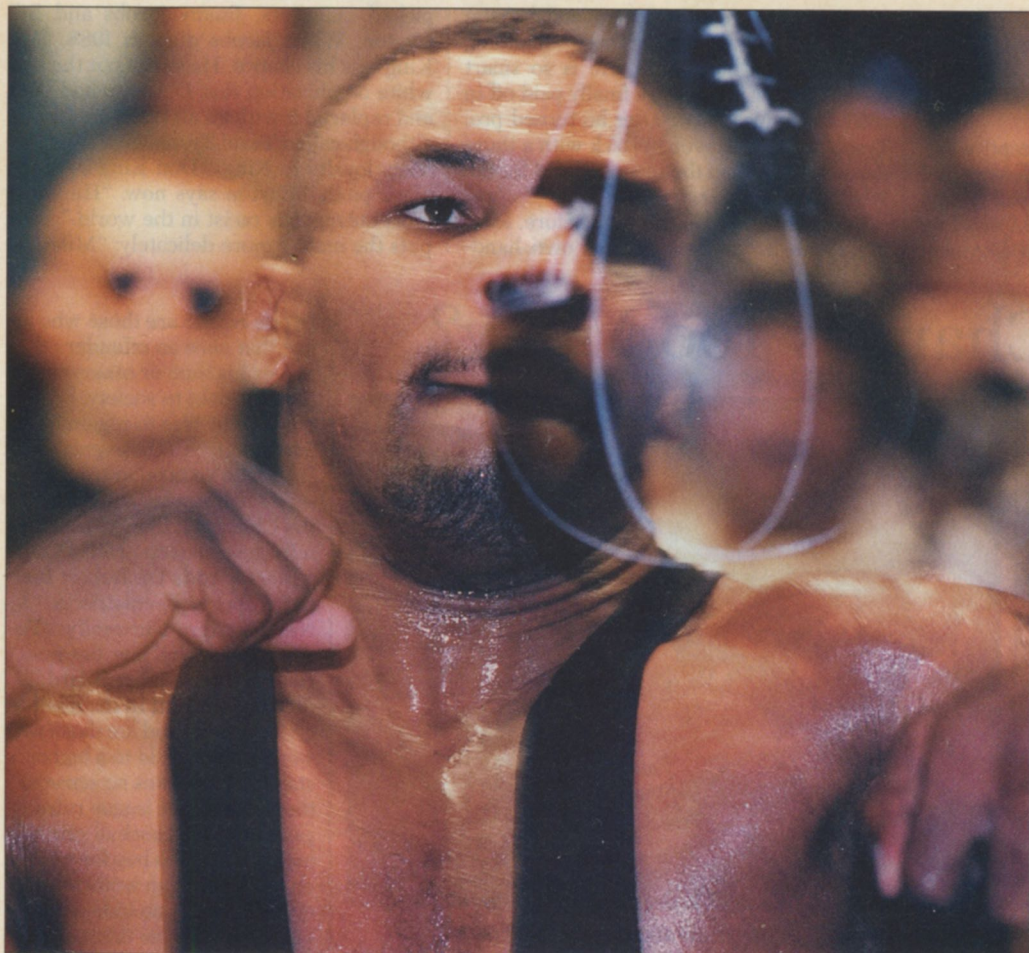
If he gets there, prison will look like a brilliant career move. A daily regimen of shadowboxing, jogging and weight lifting sculpted his thickening frame down to a taut 218 pounds. He also worked on the egotism that got him into trouble in the first place. "I was arrogant and still full of myself from my days before when I did anything I wanted to do and people accepted it," he admits. "I thought I could carry that inside, but an older brother told me I wouldn't make it out alive without a serious change, and he was right."

Tyson has toned up his mind, too. Despite a ninth-grade education, he read widely in prison, although probably not quite as deeply as the many accounts of the champ's rhapsodizing over world literature might suggest. "Voltaire and Tolstoy were interesting but very complicated," he says. "I don't think you have to be that complicated to get a point across." His biceps are tattooed with the images of two unlikely new heroes from his reading—Mao Zedong (for his perseverance) and Arthur Ashe (for his strength)—but his studies were largely

concentrated on his own predicament, circling the twin issues of race and relationships. Although he had been baptized into the Baptist faith by the Rev. Jesse Jackson in 1988, he converted in prison to Islam. He called the black historian John Henrik Clarke almost daily, and a stream of black luminaries like Whitney Houston, M. C. Hammer, Hakeem Olajuwon and Malcolm X's widow, Dr. Betty Shabazz, came to visit. He astounded Maya Angelou by reciting some of her poetry. But he was equally interested in the books by *Essence* magazine's contributor Nathaniel Hare and by Na'im Abkar, who analyzes the black male psyche. He drew the line at Dr. Ruth Westheimer, who mailed him a book of sex tips with a chatty note. "I don't know why she sent me that," he says, puzzled.

WOMEN REMAIN A MYSTERY to Mike Tyson. Besides the rape conviction, there was the disastrous marriage to Robin Givens, as well as some allegations of sexual misconduct. "Relationships are funny

things," he says. "My mother and father had a horrible relationship." Never married, the two fought furiously the few times they got together. "So it's kind of hard to learn to have a good one," Tyson goes on. "I used to spend \$20,000 on a girl I'd just met without thinking twice. I didn't respect money or the responsibility that came with it. That's what getting too much too soon will do to you. I didn't respect anything, and no one could tell me anything." He still lavishes money on the people he loves. He supports a 5-year-old daughter, Michael Lorna, sending her to Muslim school in Harlem, and also takes care of a 4-year-old boy named D'Amato Tyson, named after his late adored boxing coach, even though a blood test did not confirm the mother's claim in litigation that Tyson was the father. After celebrated flings with supermodel Naomi Campbell and former Miss America Suzette Charles, Tyson is now quietly seeing a medical-school grad named Monica Turner, whose tattooed image he has added to his right arm. According to friends of Tyson's, he has showered her with expensive gifts.



WILLIAM R. SALLAZ—DUOMO

Punching out in Vegas: *Do you believe the muscles, or the quiet little boy inside?*

Now that Tyson is returning to national consciousness as a convicted rapist, his woman problem has become America's. In June his Harlem supporters unwittingly whipped up a controversy when they announced plans for a homecoming parade to thank Tyson for the roughly \$1 million he was donating to local charities. This outraged former Washington Post reporter Jill Nelson enough to assemble the group African Americans Against Violence and to help organize a candlelight protest vigil the night before the planned parade. "Don't present Tyson as a hero after a rape conviction," Nelson says. "We have to stop defending people blindly. There is this attitude that black women should defend black men at all costs, and that has to end. Wrong is wrong." The flap caused backers to drop the parade idea, and Tyson was merely "saluted." Although he was invited to the vigil, he spent the evening shopping. But New York state Sen. David Paterson, who attended both the vigil and the salute, believes Tyson missed a chance to put the issue behind him. "If Tyson thinks he didn't do it," he says, "then he should have even less prob-

lem condemning violence against women."

Should anyone root for Tyson? As with O.J., the division between those who still like Mike and those who don't runs along racial lines. Blacks have learned to be suspicious of what they regard as a white-dominated criminal-justice system, especially for an offense as hard to prove as date rape. And they may wonder whether any African-American, having done time, can truly get a second chance. "If Mike Tyson can't be redeemed, then a lot of kids can't be redeemed," says the Rev. Al Sharpton, who attended the homecoming. "Then Newt Gingrich is right to build jails for our brothers, our nephews, our cousins and just throw the key away." While whites have largely been frightened off, Tyson's popularity among blacks appears undimmed. During Tyson's incarceration, Martin Lawrence occasionally wore a FREE MIKE TYSON T shirt on his popular Fox TV show, "Martin." And Tyson's high-profile friends aren't backing away. "He made a mistake and he paid for it," says basketball star Shaquille O'Neal. "He's my friend and I want to see him given a fair

chance again to make it back to the top."

The world will probably never fully understand Mike Tyson. Is he the self-proclaimed "baddest man on the planet" who reportedly once said that the best punch he ever threw was at Robin Givens, or is he the soulful bluesman who listens to Billie Holiday and Muddy Waters because "it's good to be sad sometimes"? Do you believe the muscles, or the quiet little boy inside? It's standard boxing hype for a fighter to proclaim himself a public menace. But a lot of Tyson's persona is simply the hip-hop style of his generation of young blacks who founded rap music and rebelliously give a middle-fingered salute to just about everything that white America stands for. "I used to love the rap songs that said the N word and B word," says Tyson, "but I don't cosign for those words now because they are just not an acceptable way of referring to black people or to women." Explains Cornel West, author of "Race Matters": "Hip-hop is all about violence, sex, anger, fury and rage. It's the natural expression of a world that is closed in."

That certainly describes Brownsville, one of the harshest sections of Brooklyn and still Tyson's one true home. At dawn before the Harlem homecoming, he went by himself to the roof over his family's tenement, where he raised pigeons as a child. "They were the only things that could fly out of Brownsville," explains Sharpton, who grew up a few blocks away.

AS A KID, TYSON YANKED NECKLACES off women, lifted wallets, pushed drunks' fingers into the snow to slide off their rings, but his touch wasn't always light. One time, he sliced his sleeping brother's arm with a razor blade, then poured alcohol over the wound just for the pleasure of seeing him scream. He played around with guns, but found that his fists had nearly as powerful an effect. They got him respect—and, by the age of 12, a lengthy rap sheet. The cops sent him to reform school in upstate New York. There, a former professional boxer noticed that the kid had a talent for boxing and put him in touch with the aging, brilliant trainer Cus D'Amato, who took a look and told everyone

that Mike Tyson was going to be a heavy-weight champion. He invited Tyson to live with him and his longtime companion in their Victorian house in Catskill and eventually became the boy's legal guardian.

Tyson proved a remarkably receptive student of the D'Amato system of offensive and defensive boxing. "Mike Tyson's real strength has always been his head," says Jose Torres, a former champion and D'Amato

protégé, who wrote the controversial Tyson biography "Fire & Fear." "That's something most people don't realize. He is so smart inside the ring." The work finally paid off in 1986 when, just a year after he turned pro, Tyson dropped Trevor Berbick with a thunderous left hook in the second round for the World Boxing Council crown.

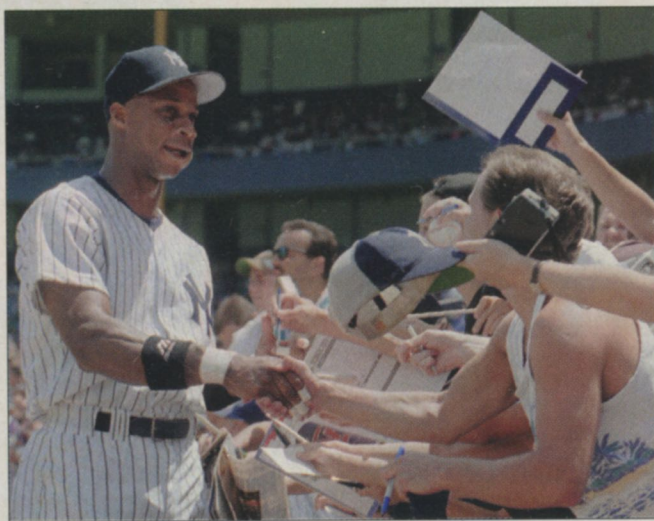
D'Amato had died the year before, leaving Tyson in the hands of his own hand-

picked managers, Jimmy Jacobs and Bill Cayton. When Jacobs died in 1988, Don King saw his chance. He swept out the lily-white organization that D'Amato had built and replaced it with an all-black crew who, although called Team Tyson, owe their primary loyalty to King. "Don King used the black pitch," Cayton says now. "He is the most outrageous racist in the world." King puts the matter more delicately: "Mike Ty-

Are Two Chances Too Many?

HERE ARE DARRYL Strawberry stats you'll find only in the Slugger Hall of Fame. In 1990, the baseball star is arrested for pulling a .25-caliber semiautomatic on his wife. Three years later, he's taken into custody for striking his girlfriend in the face with his fist. In April 1994, Strawberry fails to show up for a game, then admits to a drug problem and checks into the Betty Ford Center. In December, he's indicted for and eventually pleads guilty to tax evasion—for failing to report roughly \$350,000 he got from little boys and girls standing in line for his autograph. Two months later, Major League Baseball suspends him for flunking a cocaine test. When the 60 days are up, the New York Yankees sign him for \$850,000 per annum. Last week, in his first appearance at the ballpark immortalized by Gehrig, DiMaggio and Mantle, Darryl Strawberry gets... a standing ovation.

It's a great country. America has always been the home of second chances. Just take a gander at Hugh Grant on late-night TV or lick 32 cents' worth of Richard Nixon in the Postal Service's recent offering. But the tolerance of American sports these days—and of the fans who support them—is remarkable. It isn't just Darryl or Iron Mike. Steve Howe, seven-time drug offender, is Strawberry's teammate, leading to Yankee Stadium's new nickname, "The Halfway House That Ruth Built." Warren Moon continues to play football for the Minnesota Vikings, despite being arrested for hitting his wife. Even golf has its miscreants. Three years ago



Darryl Strawberry
Domestic violence, cocaine use, alcohol abuse, tax evasion. Back in baseball (above). House arrest—after games.

Steve Howe
Strawberry's teammate. Seven baseball suspensions for

substance abuse—a big-league record.

Warren Moon
Beats up his wife. Gets family counseling. Still in football.

John Daly
Pleads guilty to harassing his wife. Golf-fan favorite.

Dwight Gooden
Star pitcher does drugs, gets suspended. Wants back in.

Vince Coleman
Sets off firecracker in stadium lot. Three are injured. He pleads to lesser charge, does community service. Still in baseball.

John Daly was charged with throwing his second wife against a wall (he pleaded guilty to harassment); last month John Daly, recovering alcoholic, won the British Open.

Why are these guys allowed to stay in the game? If your typical employee at, say, NEWSWEEK, were busted for snorting coke, beating a spouse and cheating the IRS, would he be kept on the job, subject only to house arrest and daily urine tests? Not likely, since just about anybody can write a headline. It's different in sports. Strawberry may be a

bad apple, but he's still one of the few humans who can hit a 95-mph fast ball. He'll help the team, generate some publicity in this scourge year for baseball, and—yes—make some bucks for the Yankees. Of course, that's not why he was given a contract (nearly eight times the required minimum). "If we can help turn him around," proclaimed owner George Steinbrenner, "it will be a wonderful example to children." George knows all about repeat losers: he has been suspended from baseball twice.

The debate is a familiar one.

In one corner are those who argue that once an offender serves his time or otherwise pays his debt to society, he ought to be free to regain his livelihood. "All these great rock stars who've been in trouble," says Mike Royko, columnist for the Chicago Tribune, "nobody tells them to stop playing their guitars." Adds Dr. Robert Burton, a sports psychiatrist at Northwestern University: "Tyson broke a civil law, but no clear professional standard."

Sexual assault: In the less-forgiving grandstand are those who want athletes held to a higher standard. It makes no sense to them that under league rules gambling on a baseball game means a lifetime ban for a player, but beating up women—a crime—carries no independent sanction. "It's one thing if you gave Tyson a job as a delivery boy," says Prof. Pauline Bart of the University of Illinois. "But to put him in the position of becoming a millionaire again, what's three years in jail?" In small-town Green Bay, Wis., several years ago, star football player James Lofton was traded out of town after he was accused of sexual assault. (He was eventually acquitted.) "It was best that he move on," says Robert Harlan, the Green Bay team president. "The feeling of the community was, the time had come."

That view may give the likes of Lofton too much credit as role models. There's no evidence that kids are impressed by sex crimes, proven or otherwise. Besides, children already have other athletes to look up to—Andre Agassi, Deion Sanders, Dennis Rodman. Wonderful news for parents.

DAVID A. KAPLAN with
KAREN SPRINGEN in Chicago and
NINA A. BIDDLE in New York

son is loved and respected by the black community because he never forgets where he comes from. He's not out trying to act white and have all white people around him."

Torres believes that an inveterate street hustler like King was able to win Tyson over largely by the entrancing power of cash money, once offering a shopping bag containing \$100,000 for every knockout. But, of course, the money does not flow only one way. In his just-published "Only in America: The Life and Crimes of Don King," Jack Newfield charges that King—who, he notes, did time for manslaughter, endured legal challenges from several of his fighters and is up on wire-fraud charges—has cheated Tyson out of as much as \$7 million in the seven years he has been Tyson's exclusive promoter, largely by billing his personal and professional expenses to the fighter's account. King responded to the book and to wire-fraud charges last week in USA Today: "Lies, lies, lies."

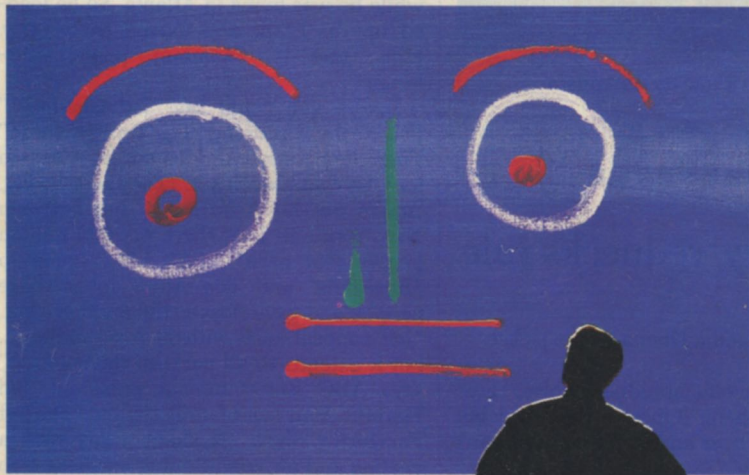
Many wonder whether the fighter can really regain his championship form. Practically as soon as King took over in 1988,



Using his head: Preparing to make a run at the title—maybe
LENNOX McLENDON—AP

Tyson seemed to lose much of the drive and intensity that had made him so fearsome in the ring and soon surrendered his crown to a 42-1 long shot, James (Buster) Douglas. "He fell off the wagon," says Rock Newman, manager of heavyweight Riddick Bowe. "He was getting hit with big shots, and he'd lost his quickness and timing." At the same time, his personal life turned into a cesspool of supposed suicide attempts; declarations by Robin Givens to Barbara Walters that Tyson was manic-depressive; trashed mansions and a rape conviction.

NEWSWEEK. "I'm just a brother trying to survive under difficult circumstances." Still, he believes he is wiser now. "Human nature is to look out for one's self, and that's what people do. I understand that more than ever. I've been used so much. People have taken from me and done all kinds of things to me all my life. But I am still here, and I am not broken." Whether he can continue to withstand the poundings of fame and fortune—that's the big question. Compared with that, facing down Peter McNeeley should be no sweat.



To truly appreciate



rt
like this,
look
deep
within
yourself
and ask,