

## **1968 U.S. Olympic Team Oral History Project: Transcript of Interview**

Interviewer: Desiree Harguess

Narrator: George Foreman, 1968 Olympic Games, Boxing

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[Begin recording]

Interviewer: Today is January 16, 2013. This is Desiree Harguess on behalf of the H.J. Lutcher Stark Center for Physical Culture and Sports. As part of the 1968 US Olympic Team Oral History Project, I am interviewing George Foreman over the phone about his experiences in the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City.

George, can you begin with when and where you were born?

George Foreman: I was born January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1949 in Marshall, Texas.

Interviewer: And where did you grow up?

George Foreman: I actually grew up in Houston, Texas.

Interviewer: When did you first start participating in sports?

George Foreman: I can remember participating in sports as far as I can remember back. But it was actually in middle school, well, junior high school, that I had my first experience with football.

Interviewer: Did you have any relatives, older brothers, or did your father encourage you in football?

George Foreman: As a matter of fact, I didn't have anyone else participating in sports family wise. As I can remember, I was about the first one in my immediate family to even participate in organized sports as a team.

Interviewer: Who motivated you or encouraged you to do that?

George Foreman: I'd always liked sports since I was little. Just the neighborhood boys would practice in the afternoon basketball, and we'd watch television. And the first hero I truly had was the great running back from The Cleveland Browns, was Jim Brown, my motivation.

Interviewer: So you looked up to Jim Brown?

George Foreman: I really looked up to Jim Brown. He was the first person I had seen, I guess, once I saw him without his helmet. And that was something you seldom see on television back in the day. But I decided that's who I wanted to be.

Interviewer: So when did you first become involved in boxing?

George Foreman: Boxing was really a...I was 17 years old already before I had really gotten into boxing. I went into the Job Corps Center in 1965. And after spending a year there, I decided...a little story I told everyone that I was a bully. Everyone called me a bully. And they said if I was so tough, why didn't I become a boxer? So when I went to Pleasanton, California to the Job Corps Center that's where I first got my first introduction to boxing. I was already 17.

Interviewer: Was there anybody in boxing that you looked up to or that you thought about emulating?

George Foreman: The first boxing match that I really paid some attention to was back in the day of Cassius Clay and Sonny Liston. He hadn't changed his name to Muhammed Ali yet. That was the first boxing match that I noticed my older brother and his friends came to listen to on the radio. And they were real interested. And I was really interested how all of them could be interested in one event, and it

was a boxing match. And that was my first experience truly watching or listening to a boxing match with the radio there.

Interviewer: How did that affect your motivation in boxing?

George Foreman: I saw it and I truly wasn't motivated at that time to be a boxer, but that was my introductory into what boxing was all about, listening to the radio—one guy pulling one way, another guy pulling another way. But after the Job Corps experience and my telling the kids that I would be a boxer, that really was my, probably, my first step into the whole situation.

Interviewer: Describe the path to the Olympic Trials. What were some of your major victories and accomplishments on the way to The Olympic Trials?

George Foreman: Well, in boxing you have to win a major tournament to even qualify for the Olympic Trials. I had won, initially, The San Francisco Golden Glove. I had one fight, but my advisor and manager at that time in the amateur division, Doc Broadus, really said I needed more experience. So he had me go to Las Vegas where I fought another major tournament hoping I'd get more fights. And I actually lost. But that one fight, that one in San Francisco, qualified me for the Olympic Trials in Ohio. Eventually, that same year, because I was part of the Golden Glove in San Francisco, they sent me on a tour of Germany to box. We had two boxing matches there, a whole team from the United States. And I won one boxing match there and disqualified the other, picking up experience as I went. So those fights, one after another, they qualified me, and then the trip to Europe really gave me some international experience.

After qualifying for the Olympic Trials, of course in Ohio again, I won the heavyweight Olympic Trials there. That qualified me, of course, again for...I'm sorry. I won the national AAU tournament there because of the Golden Glove that qualified me for the national team, because you have to be on a national team to qualify for the Olympic Trial. I won the San Francisco Golden Glove. It qualified me for the national AAU. And I had about four boxing matches there.

That qualified me for the Trials. This is all, as a matter of fact, in '68. Of course, I was successful in the Olympic Trials, winning four boxing matches there. Then it was just hanging on for the United States Olympic team because that qualified me.

Interviewer: How did your friends, family, and the people that knew you back home react to finding out that you had made the Olympic team?

George Foreman: Well, the strangest thing is I had my first truly organized boxing match in February of '67. Now, October of '68 I'm on the Olympic Team with, at that time, less than 19 boxes, I think, total. So, no one really had a lot of expectation for me because first they hear I'm boxing. Next thing you know, I'm on the Olympic Team with a handful of boxing matches. So everyone was surprised. But because I had made the Olympic Team it meant traveling. I didn't even get a chance to talk to a lot of people or become friends, explain it to a lot of people. There was not a lot of press in those days. No one really knew.

My mom didn't really believe I was a boxer until she saw me on the Olympic Trials on television.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. So they were pretty shocked I imagine.

George Foreman: Yeah. A lot of people just shocked because they heard about I was supposed to be a tough kid, but they didn't really believe I was going to get that deep into boxing.

Interviewer: Right.

George Foreman: So it was a sort of surprise even to myself.

Interviewer: Well they must have been very proud.

George Foreman: Once I made the Olympic Team, I called the local newspaper there. And I told them that I'd like to tell all my friends that George Foreman...and I knew no one knew me in Houston as George Foreman. They called me Monkey or Monk. And I said to please tell all my friends I'd made the Olympic Team, this actually from the Olympic training camp. But I said, "Don't say George Foreman. You gotta put George "Monkey" Foreman. Otherwise, they won't know who I am."

Interviewer: Oh, how funny!

George Foreman: So the reporter did as much. Put in the local newspaper that I had become part of the Olympic Team. Then people in Houston were alerted.

Interviewer: What was the general reaction then?

George Foreman: Yeah, but remember by this time I'm part of the Olympic Team, so there wasn't no one to text. There wasn't a text in those days. There wasn't a lot of telephones. You had to find a phone even to call. So my parents told me later on there was a big reaction. But I didn't get that experience. I was too far away. But I was happy to let them know that I was doing it. And speaking with my mom, she was proud because she had read it in the newspaper as much.

Interviewer: Tell me about some of the preparations after you made the team. What preparations do you remember? Was there, for example, preparing for the high altitude of Mexico City or anything like that?

George Foreman: Yeah. Once we made the Olympic Team, it was no more "maybe him, maybe not him". We all became one team. There was a team coach selected, Pappi Gault, of course, which means we have to travel to high altitude. And this would take me to New Mexico. I forgot the city at this point, but we trained in a college. They had rooms for us...at a college with dormitories way up in the hills of New Mexico. So it consisted of high altitude training, running and exercising. And we had a gym there where we boxed, and trained, and worked out daily. And I was so big I didn't have a lot of sparring there, because I was the only heavyweight on the team.

Interviewer: What did you weigh at the time and what was your height?

George Foreman: I was about 6'2", 212 pounds.

Interviewer: Oh, wow. Do you remember experiencing any of the effect of high altitude when you first got to the training camp?

George Foreman: I remember ...to hear everyone talk about the altitude and that we were high. And so, when you hear everyone talking about it, you assume that you are feeling it because everyone is talking about it. And I had that assumption. But that's all I can tell you then. I assumed I had some effects; it did affect me. I assumed. And even now I assume. But to have an absolute conclusion about it, I don't know.

Interviewer: OK. Was there anyone on the Olympic team with whom you were particularly close? Did you have a good friend or did you make a good friend?

George Foreman: Now, there were about, I think, 11 or 12 of us. I'm not certain the number. I had to sit there and count from lightweight, mini lightweights, and, you know, you go all the way up to heavyweights. Could be 9. I just can't remember. It'd take a moment. But I was friends with everyone on the team because I was one of the young ones. I was 19. And I did a lot of horse playing. The others were pretty mature about it. And they laughed at me because I continued to play all the time, play, play. "Play too much" they called me.

But Ron Harris, Ronnie Harris was actually the lightweight on the team. We became good friends. His dad was part of the...wherever he boxed, his dad, by his own expense, would travel to be close to him. so I became close with Ron Harris in particular.

Interviewer: Do you remember hearing anything about possible protests or possible boycotts by members of the US team in the months leading up to the Olympic Games?

George Foreman: Even before we'd gotten to Mexico City there was a lot of talk because the then famous Kareem Jabbar, who would qualify for the basketball team, was from Los Angeles, and a few other of the athletes made statements that they may not participate because someone had organized a boycott. And they were all talking about it. But remember, at this point I'm not even possible of making the Olympic Team. I've had like...let me see. I won the Golden Gloves...It'll take me a moment to try and calculate this. I won the Golden Glove, four fights there, the Olympic Trials...that's eight fights. I think another box-off...I had about 10 fights. I had a total of 24 boxing matches. 10 of those was just qualifying for the Olympic Trials. So at this point there's no celebrity attached to my name. no one would even talk to me, because who is that?

But the track and field guys, basketball guys, and some other teams were approached by people about boycotting the team. They were celebrity. But people like myself, we weren't even spoken to, let alone approached.

So we heard on television about it, but that's about as far as it had gotten. Once I won the Olympic Trials and made the team, we traveled to Denver, Colorado, which I really felt the high altitude there. You'd lose your breath. But we was only there for a week or so. When I was sitting in the room, there were a couple of people came by to visit me by way of someone else who knew the team. They asked me would I please be a part of Richard Nixon's campaign? They felt he was going to be become the President of the United States and they asked me to help them.

I remember that. and I remember some of the other guys talking about being approached, not the boxers, by people who were going to boycott the Olympics. Then they called off the boycott and they said the guys were going to do other things other than boycott the Olympics.

Let me see. There were at least four members of my boxing team who were actually career military people. Arthur Redden was serving in the Armed Forces. Oh, and these people were called patriotic to the fullest degree. And I'd hear them talk about what someone was going in the Olympics. And they really thought it was an ugly situation. So I listened to them pretty clearly and took on whatever attitude they had.

They said, "No one better talk to me about that foolishness!" No one ever spoke to me about it, but I still had that attitude like, "No one better speak to me about that foolishness!" [laughs] Because of the influence of the guys from The Armed Forces on the team. They were pretty leader type guys.

That was my venture and the only venture I had into probable boycott.

Interviewer: Sure, sure. Do you remember hearing anything about student protests and violence in Mexico City about 10 days before the start of the Games?

George Foreman: We heard a lot about it. We were being warned to steer clear and maybe we shouldn't go out of the Olympic Village because there was so much carrying on. And they squashed a lot of it before we had gotten there, all of the protests. It was really rough on a lot of students about it,

especially in Mexico. And they asked us to kind of stay close to the Village and not to wander off too far, because we may find ourself into some trouble, too.

That frightened us, too. Because of that, they told us maybe we should...generally, there was a lot of visiting of landmarks and all of that. They asked us to stay in to the Village and not to do as much because of the danger.

Interviewer: What were your impressions of Mexico City and the people there when you first arrived?

George Foreman: Well they gave us a nice talking to, some fellow Olympians from the past told us about the proud people of Mexico and don't take them lightly. And they gave us some stories about how they really had a lot of pride and they loved their country. And don't go there and think that Americans are better than people from Mexico. They gave us a lot. So I was on the alert.

But once I got there, everyone I met from Mexico was kind, really kind. They were generous. And just like we were proud to be on the Olympic Team, it seemed they were proud to be hosting the Olympics in their country as well.

Interviewer: What did you think of the Olympic Village?

George Foreman: Now, the Olympic Village was something special. All of us boxers had our own floor, as a matter of fact. Daily, we'd get up and exercise and go out to the...all of us ended up doing roadwork around the track. and we'd see all the celebrity track stars out there running, and stretching, and all of those things, go back and clean up and then head to the chow hall, where they had the most delicious and all kind of...the food was a variety of delicious foods. And you could eat as much as you want, walk around after, go back and lay down.

We were careful about drinking the water. A couple of us had some incidents where we didn't know about the water and we accidentally drunk some and got sick. But other than that, we loved the Village. It was a place where you could walk around.



I'd see guys who looked just like me, walk up to them and, "Hey! How you doing, man?" And they'd speak another language. That was all brand new to me, the people from all over the country. The only thing that differentiated us from one another were the colors we wore; tracksuits- red, white, and blue or whatever other colors from other countries. That's when I started to realize pride in your country. The colors you wear were who we were.

Interviewer: What are your memories from the opening ceremony?

George Foreman: There were a couple of guys on our team who had been to previous Olympics. They warned us about the march around, but when they let the pigeons go, be careful. [laughs] I was, "Be careful how?" They'd say, "You'll find out." But it was nice because we all dressed as one. And all the other nations were dressed as another. And we marched out, stand in one place, look up. There was a lot of standing around waiting for the team before us and the team afterwards. It was real great. And we'd sit there and listen to the tributes and the music. Then they let the pigeons go. Then we understood what to watch out for. Those pigeons dropped and dropped and pooped on us. [laughs]

Interviewer: You talked a little bit about meeting athletes from other countries. Do you remember any specific interactions? Did you make friends with anybody from another country?

George Foreman: I remember the guys that I really approached from different countries. I'd walk up to them and we just couldn't speak. It wasn't like I have...You know, after you become a celebrity athlete you meet people and you have interpreters. In those days there was no one to interpret anything for us.

But I remember some of the guys from Yugoslavia, or whatever different countries, and one big weight lifter, power lifter. We'd see each other every day and just smile. All we had was smiling. We'd smile at one another. And that's what I can remember, the smiles that we interchanged. We did give smiles, great smiles. Like, "Good to see you today! Hope you are doing OK!" We said it all in smiles.

Interviewer: That's wonderful. Who was your biggest competition in terms of competition from another country in boxing? Who were you looking out for?

George Foreman: In boxing, the great countries then were the two superpowers. That would be the United States and Russia itself. Everyone was careful and mindful that you may have to meet the

Russians, and they would be the ones that you could get beat up by. So we were careful of that. Generally, the United States somehow would meet Russia at the end of the tournament. That's what happened with me especially.

Interviewer: How did that go? What were those interactions like with the Soviet athletes?

George Foreman: Well, once again, all the athletes are friendly. There was no mistreating or meanness one to another. We, I guess, see one another in the Olympic Village and just as happy and smiling to see one another. Like I said, we all had these great smiles. But we understood where the competition was going to come from. There was never any animosity or anything at all, just friendliness. I had a total of four boxing matches. And my last one would be my opponent from Russia.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about that?

George Foreman: Well, my opponent from Russia had won, of course, all of his fights. And this would be my last fight. I think it was my fourth fight. He probably had the same thing. But the luxury for me, that the Russian opponent had already beaten the Mexico representative. So when I got into the ring, they were automatically pulling for me. [laughs]

Interviewer: Oh, that must have been nice.

George Foreman: So everyone was cheering for me, and that was really good, just because he had defeated their representative. That was like hometown atmosphere there. But getting into the ring, as I said, I had already surprised myself. I wanted to make the Olympics and I wanted to win every boxing match. I didn't want to get beat up or anything. But I had no idea that I would become an Olympic gold medalist; none whatsoever.

So getting into the ring that day, it had already qualified me as the final match. Even if I just got in the ring, I'd automatically be a silver medalist. I remember telling my mom, "Well, even if I don't win I'll have a silver medal." My mom never said much but, "Hurry home and eat!"

So getting in the ring, and I used my jab just like I was told over and over. He would continuously follow me and I would throw shots. And he'd come and follow me. I wasn't the most experienced boxer, but I could really hit hard. I was a hard hitter, what they call a puncher. And he just ran into a lot of shots of mine. I remember that altitude, not like New Mexico. This was really something. Your chest started burning, your throat is dry, and you feel like you may want to faint if the fight goes another moment, if you have to throw another...This was the second round of my throwing a lot of shots and jumping away from the Russian's punches. I said, "I don't know what I'm going to do." Just when I didn't have anymore, the referee stepped in, pulled us apart and declared that I was the winner of that boxing match. I was then the Olympic heavyweight champion of the world.

Interviewer: How did it feel? What were you thinking and feeling?

George Foreman: To win that boxing match was probably the most thrilling thing that had ever happened to me in my life, because I had never had a dream to come true. Years before then, I went to Job Corps, especially because I was a high school dropout. Lyndon Johnson promised war on poverty. And I qualified for the Job Corps program to get a second chance at education and get a vocational training.

So I went away. I just thought I was going to go back to Houston and earn \$1,000 and live happily ever after. I had no idea that dreams happened for people.

So when that boxing match was stopped, I went into almost shock. I said, "This can't be happening. I'm winning the thing?" I remember watching over and over the story of Jim Thorpe, who was an Olympic gold medalist and Native American. Over and over I used to watch it. There I am being given the Olympic wreath afterwards and that medal put around my neck. It was unbelievable. Even some days now when I rethink it I'm in shock. But it's equally as thrilling, just the memory. Nothing like that had ever happened to me. Nothing.

Interviewer: It's very thrilling. So one famous picture from that match is afterwards when you were waving a small American flag. Can you tell us about that and how that came about?

George Foreman: I said earlier about meeting fellow Olympians from all over the world, no one spoke the same language. But I'd meet people who looked just like me. So that was kinda confusing, because I didn't know...I thought everyone, especially who looked like me, spoke English.

And so, I'm going into the ring. You have your robe, your trunks, everything, your shirt...everything is representing your country. But then it was talked about over half a billion people watching that boxing match. I said, "They are going to think that I am from somewhere else. They are going to look at me and say, 'Where is he from?'"

So I had the small American flag for good luck in my trunks, lucky beads and everything I had gotten from Sargent Rogers. We said if I win the boxing match, I said, "I gotta make certain I tell them where I'm from. I gotta show everybody where I'm from," just hoping that I'd win the boxing match. But can you believe the fight is over, they got ready to give me my robe. I reached into the pocket, got the flag. Generally, we'd bow to each corner anyway just to show how humble you are to win the judges' decision. And I bowed as I normally would, but this time I held the flag as I bowed, showing it off. I said, "Now they know where I'm from. Now they know where I'm from."

And people started cheering so much I actually waved the flag, just a little flag, my souvenir, to make certain everyone knew where I was from. Not a protest. No anti-protest. Not about a boycott. No boycott. It was just a thrilling moment from the Olympic Village to let them know, "He's really from America! Oh!" [laughs]

Interviewer: That's a great story. I hadn't heard that version of it yet.

George Foreman: But that's the truth. There was nothing else. Afterwards I heard it was in newspapers across the country, and what it meant, and how it felt to a lot of people. But it wasn't protest or anything. It was just a happy teenager wanting everyone to know where I was from.

Interviewer: George, do you remember the '68 Games were the first Olympic Games, the Summer Games at least, where they implemented standardized drug testing? Do you remember anything about that and did you have to have a drug test?

George Foreman: No. I don't remember any kind of drug test at all. But I think in those times they were testing some of the events that had a history, like wrestling and weightlifting and stuff, of people using steroids and all those things and different hormones with some of the women's teams. But there wasn't too much suspicion in boxing at that time.

Interviewer: Do you remember any female Olympians? Do you remember meeting any while you were there? And what did you think about that?

George Foreman: Yeah. It's strange because there was a runner on the Olympic Team. Her name was Iris Davis. She was a track star. She had come in representing Tennessee State. I don't want to misquote it and be wrong. But anyway, she was a nice looking lady. I used to go in the evening time and walk around with she and some of the other boxing members and chat. I think I had a crush on her.

I had no idea how she was doing in the track, no idea. But Wyomia Tyus, I think, and Willie...can't think of Willie's last name now. There were a few that we'd see daily and we'd wave and say hello to them. but we didn't have a lot of conversation with them. and I just watched the other swimmers of course. There was one girl who was on the diving team who was really friendly with me. I used to see her daily because she'd complain also about her back. I didn't know that diving you could hurt your back and get a sore back and things of that nature.

And you'd see them on the track field, but not too much mingling. No one really had that much time. You didn't have time to see the events of other athletes. I didn't because we were all in preparation of our own events.

Interviewer: Right. That's too bad.

George Foreman: Yeah, I missed that because everyone saw us on television, but we couldn't see. We didn't even get much television on the events in the Village.

Interviewer: Did you witness Tommy Smith and John Carlos's protest on the medal stand?

George Foreman: We only saw part on the television. I was not at the field. But I remember one afternoon there was media by...I don't know how many...like soldiers. They were following and asking questions of John Carlos. And he was walking. He was angry. He'd turn around and tell them something. He'd walk around...

And I felt real bad, because at that point we knew they had dismissed him, he had to leave The Olympic Village. I remember watching him...I'd seen him out on the field doing his warmups on the track. He was always a happy-go-lucky guy. But this day he had this mean look on his face and hurt. No one wanted to be dismissed. Even if you lost, you didn't want to be kicked out of the Olympic Village. I mean this was all we lived for.

I remember feeling so sorry for him. I had a feeling of...it's almost like grief. I saw it on his face as well.

Interviewer: I'm sure.

George Foreman: But that's what I saw with my own eyes. I didn't see it on television. Of course there was a lot of reports leaving the Olympic Village about us in the Olympic Village. But this is one of those things I saw, an athlete looking at another athlete. And I'd known hurt. And I saw it in his face.

Interviewer: Do you remember any specific memories of hearing about record setting events while you were there?

George Foreman: Ooh, yes. And that's when I told you I heard about the Olympics and...you're pushed into athletes. Young people are pushed into being athletes; people believe in you and we do it because people believe in us. Going to the Olympics, winning the gold medal and all that, that didn't mean a whole lot because you don't know anything about it.

But one morning I went to eat one morning, well, it was a brunch, late, and there was Bob Beamon. Beamon? Yeah. He was eating his lunch, getting his tray and he had this beautiful thing around his neck and everyone was admiring it. It was the first Olympic gold medal the team had won. He had evidently long jumped and broke the record. World record, he had broken. And it was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen in my life. The Olympic gold medal.

That's when I said, "I sure wish I had one of those." It was so beautiful. I'd never...we won a lot of medals, Olympic medals and AAU medals and Golden Glove medals. We'd won those things, but this thing was like something out of a treasury from the middle of the Earth or deep from out of the Earth. There was a shine to it but not too shiny, but it was like nothing I had ever seen in my life, that Olympic medal. And I looked and looked. Everyone was just looking and piled around him, but we didn't dare ask to touch. That was when I said, "I sure would like one of those."

Other than that I had no idea. I just thought it was going to be another among other trophies we'd won. Not like that; that was the first one we seen. The whole team marveled at this. No, no, not the whole

team, the whole Village. I mean everyone in that room, because we all ate together, international restaurant.

I: Did you wear your medal after you won it? Did you wear it around the Village?

George Foreman: Yeah, but after I saw that one with him....once you won the gold medal I wore that thing everywhere. I never did take it off.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that stands out in your mind about the time that you spent there? Any other memorable or interesting events or experiences before the closing ceremony?

George Foreman: Yeah, but I had such great days because there would be reporters coming in from places... I wasn't accustomed to that kind of attention at all. But reporters would travel in from all over the country and for some reason they would seek me out to do interviews. I didn't understand why; at this time I didn't understand celebrity at all. Daily, one would want to meet me and sit at the restaurant, one would come out...we would sit by the field and talk. That was an amazing thing to let celebrity come alive, because here was a boy who [laughs] barely knew how to fly on an airplane, sit in the airplane seat, buckle up the seat belt and there I was being interviewed daily and asked for autographs. It blew me away. It recreated me. That's what it did.

I: I'm sure. Quite a recreation and an amazing experience. What do you remember about the closing ceremony?

George Foreman: I didn't attend the closing ceremony at all. I'd gotten to the Olympic Village and there was about from one moment...remember this, no one really...I picked up that small American flag and waved the flag. And after the match I was whisked...this time we could leave the Olympic Village with friends and a friend of mine, Colonel Barney Oldfield, who worked for Litton Industries, who was the sponsor of the Job Corps center where I got my training. And I had a job with them by then; they took me to the hotel, bought me dinner and let me go into a hotel room to call all my friends and family. I was there as what you call 'someone that the media wanted to talk to'. Everywhere I went I didn't have time for anything else but to go pack my clothes and leave early the next two days. The closing ceremony happened pretty much right after my boxing match.

Interviewer: What did you do right after the Games? It sounds like you returned home and...

George Foreman: Right after the Olympic Games I had my job and I was representing San Francisco Golden Gloves. They asked me where I'd like to go and I said I'd like to go home to my family and I went to Houston, Texas.

Interviewer: What was your homecoming like?

George Foreman: My brother picked me up at the airport, and when they picked me up my family had a little sign on his car that said "George Foreman Olympic Champion. Welcome Home George Foreman" as they drove me from the airport home, tooting the horn and blowing it down the street. Some people would look out the window, but it was a little happy for the family. I remember going to my momma's little humble house, she had some food fixed for me. We hugged and told old stories. My dad came over. It was really a wonderful feeling. I left there their little boy and came back their celebrity boy. They treated me so nice. They already treated me nice anyway, but this time they were so proud. My family were so proud.

Interviewer: I want to ask you a little bit about amateurism and what amateurism was like in '68 and amateur boxing in '68 versus amateurism now and what the differences are you think.

George Foreman: I was thoroughly an amateur. I remember Harlan Marbley. Remember, you've got to check the history of those names I mispronounce. Harlan Marbley from DC. He was a mini flyweight. I experienced being on the team with guys who had families. They had sacrificed to get to the Olympics and they all had families, children. They didn't have jobs, and so they really suffered. I remember some of the guys who had troubles of this sort asking the manager of the Olympic team how they could get a few dollars to send home. And I heard them say, "We have an emergency fund that we may be able to help you, but we can only give you a little." I can't remember the amount it was so minute. I heard about it and they said, "We can get this to your family to help them." And this guy was like, "Man, I need help!" These were desperate people: "I need help," they were crying out. I was just a teenager so I wasn't in bad shape.

There were some people who would pass around shoes, different teams, and would say, "If you guys want a pair of boxing shoes, Adidas would want you to try these with rubber." I enjoyed them because



the other shoes were slippery anyway. No one ever gave us anything. It was a total sacrifice. I left my job; no one paid me while I was away. I was just hoping I had my job when I came back.

Today I see where people are given appearance fees. I'm happy for them because they will never have the horror stories like Harlan Marbley or some of the other teammates I had who didn't have anything and even after you win an Olympic gold medal didn't look forward to anything. I won an Olympic gold medal and just went back to my job in Pleasanton, California and they took me back.

To see guys who are able to go to the Olympics and then get some appearances fees or some assistance is a miracle and a wonderful miracle. It doesn't make them physically any better though. No one is any better than what we were then. It's just that there's somewhat easement in what you're doing. Athletes can benefit as much as the people who work for the Olympics.

Interviewer: What one piece of advice would you give to today's Olympic hopeful? Somebody who was hoping into the Olympics for boxing or for some other sport? What advice would you give them?

George Foreman: I'm a preacher and I do this by profession. I mean, that's my profession now for the last 35 years. Anyway, I was preaching last Sunday and I told them because I learned as an athlete the easiest thing in the world is to quit. And you can do it so easily, but it is the most hard thing to ever live down. You quit today and it haunts you for the rest of your life. I tell them, "The hardest thing to do is keep getting up and keep trying. It's very hard. But you have nothing but pleasant memories for the rest of your life for doing as much."

Interviewer: It's good advice. George, what do you think is the legacy of the 1968 Olympic Team? And what was the legacy of those Games on your life?

George Foreman: It made for me a chance to see that dreams come true. I think the 1968 Olympics will always be remembered because it was the advent...what is a big word for media? Gigantic media? Isn't there another word?

Interviewer: Broadcasting?

George Foreman: I mean, it was like mass media. It happened one second and the next second it's in your home. And the Olympics were the first one to really take advantage of that. And it'll always be remembered as that. It could have been the Olympics that derailed all the other Olympics, because when the two guys did the demonstration with the gloves that hit the whole world. Everyone saw it. It wasn't like you got to see it in delayed playback or something like that. It was instant: AP, UPS and television, media. The whole world saw that two people can show displeasure, and it led to 1972 when they killed all those athletes in the Olympic Village in Germany. If the other had never happened, no one would have ever thought that the Olympics could have been a place to vent your frustration and all of that.

And I'm not happy about that at all. If I could have spoken to John Carlos and Tommie Smith when they were young, I would have told them, "Let's keep this clean. Let's not do this because the world will see that anyone can just get this much attention. They're going to come back to our Village and do it again worse." And that's what happened. So the Olympics will be remembered in '68 as the Olympics that almost destroyed all the Olympics.

Interviewer: I see. George, can you talk a little bit about some of the biggest highlights in your boxing career after the Olympic Games and a little bit about your book, your autobiography?

George Foreman: After the Olympics of course, I never intended to be a professional boxer, but everyone was so proud of me with that gold medal and they started asking, "When are you going to be a pro? You're going to be heavyweight champion of the world!" I didn't know nor did I think about all those things. I was trying to get myself into college because the people in the Job Corps wanted me to further be a teacher. They were helping me get into college and all those things. But it was a political year, '68, where they were going to change presidents and there was some uncertainty in the atmosphere, so I just turned professional. I won quick about 30 some odd boxing matches and became heavyweight champ of the world.

Not only did boxing bring me a little fame, I had a little money. Of course, being heavyweight champ of the world you really get this feeling of superiority. Winning boxing matches and you're on television all the time, all your dreams are coming true, you're making dreams happen then. My family was well off for a change.

And so I wrote about all of those happenings in "By George, the Autobiography of George Foreman". It tells people about how one can begin humble in the United States and the sky's the limit if you're willing

to work. I got a lot of things from a lot of people, but I had to really train and work out physically myself. I punished myself, but there were a lot of great things happening to me. And it went on and, as a matter of fact, and brought me to the doorstep of God Almighty where I had an experience after the boxing match that really made a preacher out of me. That's what I do now.

Interviewer: And what was that experience?

George Foreman: I went back to the dressing room in '77 after my comeback fight with Jimmy Young and I had a vision: I was in dead and alive in a split second. At that time I didn't believe in religion; I just believed in all those dreams that were coming true. I'd lost the title and was on my way to get it back again. As I fought to save my life, I couldn't fight anymore. I was dead. I was in this dark place like a dump yard, a very sad thought I'd ever had in my life. I looked around and saw everything I'd worked for all those years crumble like ashes behind me.

And I got mad, angry because I wasn't dead and there was no more. I couldn't be helped, like someone dropped you in the sea and there's no way of coming out of there. I said, "I don't care if this is death. I still believe there's a god." When I said that there was a gigantic hand reached into nothingness and pulled me out of hopelessness and I was alive in the dressing room with blood flowing through my body. They picked me off the floor and I laid there. My doctor behind me, holding my head and I told him, "Doctor West, move your hands; the thorns on his head are making him bleed." He looked at me strange, but I saw blood coming down my forehead.

And my masseur, Mr. Fuller, was holding my head. I said, "Mr. Fuller, you move your hand. He's bleeding where they crucified him." Everybody looked at me, but I saw it. I jumped off the table, ran into the shower and started screaming, "I'm born again. Hallelujah! I'm clean. Hallelujah, I'm born again." I tried to go out and they said, "Nope. You've got to put on some clothes first." But they pulled me down and put me on the dressing room table and I started screaming. Jesus Christ was coming alive in me.

And they held me down pretty good. Finally I heard a voice and I come to my friend and they don't believe me. And I come to my brother and they don't understand me. It could have been vice versa, the other way. Then I heard the voice, "Now I go to my father." And I started screaming, "Don't let Jesus go!"

Next thing you know it was over and I said, "You witnessed a miracle. You're not going to believe it." This was in 1977. I couldn't believe it: I'd seen death, I was alive and I knew that there had really been a living God and all these things I'd heard about were really true stories. For 10 years I didn't box, you know. I didn't even make a fist from '77 to '87. Just devastated, just torn apart by this happening in my life.

Interviewer: That's quite an experience.

George Foreman: Yep. I don't want to have another of those.

Interviewer: Before we close the interview is there anything else you would like to tell us about?

George Foreman: No, other than that I lived a good life. I found out, I waved the small American flag and people jumped on my back about it: "How could you do that? The other brothers were doing that. Why did you do this?" And as the years would go I told them, "Because I believe in America. I truly love this country." And they knocked me.

And then at 45 I really was broke, and about 37 years old I had to come back to boxing. I was given a second chance to box, got a boxer's license and able to start from the bottom and to work my way all the way up again to be champion of the world. And when I did it I remember telling my kids, "See, I told you this was the home of the second and the third chance." [laughs] I was given a second chance, you know. Not given anything, but just a chance.

They asked me...when they were giving me my license hearings in California they didn't want me to come back into boxing because of my age, and the state attorney had a representative there and asked me, "Why would you want to come back to boxing George?" And I said, "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

Interviewer: That's a great answer.

George Foreman: That's the answer to my life.

Interviewer: Sounds good. Well, George, thank you so much for being so generous with your time and your memories. I'm going to shut off the recorder now.

George Foreman: OK.

[End recording]

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