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China Said to Offer \$25 Million For Tyson-Foreman in Beijing

By ROBERT MCG. THOMAS JR. JUNE 2, 1989

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The Chinese Government has agreed to pay \$25 million to stage a boxing match between the heavyweight champion, Mike Tyson, and the former champion George Foreman, Tyson's manager and the fight's promoter said yesterday.

Among other things, the fight would be contingent on Foreman's remaining undefeated and beating Tyrell Biggs in a bout planned for August. Last night in Phoenix, Foreman kept the deal alive by stopping Bert Cooper in two rounds.

"Foreman is the only opponent the Chinese are interested in," said Tyson's manager, Bill Cayton, who has given his approval for the bout. A Rookie Promoter

Bill Wheeler, the Seattle lawyer who is promoting the fight, said he had become involved in the project through contacts he made in China while representing American construction companies there. He predicted that the fight would gross \$100 million and be seen by half a billion people in China alone. Wheeler has no experience as a promoter.

Wheeler obtained a letter of intent from the Government's China International Sports Travel Company on April 21, six days after the student demonstrations began in Beijing. He said he had been repeatedly assured by his Chinese contacts in almost daily telephone calls since then that neither the demonstrations nor shifts in Government policies and personnel had dampened enthusiasm for the fight.

Although neither Tyson nor Foreman has formally agreed to the bout, Wheeler said he anticipated no serious problems in working out a deal satisfactory to both. He said Tyson and his associate Don King had indicated a strong interest in the fight, which, Wheeler suggested, would lead to Tyson's biggest purse. Wheeler said it was likely that King would serve as co-promoter of the fight.

Seth Abraham, a vice president of HBO, which owns the live television rights to Tyson's next four fights, said the proposed Tyson-Foreman bout had come up in separate conversations he had this week with King and Cayton.

Wheeler, who said the \$25 million offer was contingent on his getting the full television rights, predicted that he would be able to negotiate a mutually beneficial arrangement with HBO. Aiming for a Championship

Foreman, who lost his heavyweight title to Muhammad Ali in Zaire in 1974, has been aiming for a championship fight since beginning a comeback 2 years ago after a 10-year retirement.

The three major boxing authorities will not sanction a title bout between a champion and a boxer who is not ranked among the top 10 fighters in a division. So the unranked Foreman would need a victory over Biggs, who is ranked, to challenge Tyson.

Among the details to be worked out are the size of Tyson's purse. Cayton has set a \$20 million minimum, but Wheeler said he was pressing for \$15 million.

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