Tommy Morrison and HIV Denialism

September 3, 2013 By Shawn Decker

Last Sunday, Tommy Morrison passed to spirit. I don't have firsthand information on the whys and hows, but I did read an article that said the cause was an infection that occurred when he had pectoral implants removed last year. His promoter, wife and even he himself continued to deny he had HIV until the very end.

I first became aware of Tommy Morrison in the early 1990s, when his boxing career was beginning to explode. He had unnatural power- and made for exciting fights because of his desire to trade bombs with opponents. Sometimes he detonated on them, other times he was rendered semi-conscious as a man counted to 10 in front of him...

In 1996, he tested positive for HIV. In 1997, he was interviewed by Poz Magazine, and he claimed that HIV was a harmless virus and the medications were the poison to be concerned about. I didn't know his stance at the time, and in that same issue I wrote a column about Tommy. As a boxing fan, I was hoping he'd be joining my ranks as someone trying to shed light on the fact that you can have HIV and still have a normal life.

Instead, Tommy Morrison went all-in on conspiracy theories. After he was stripped of his boxing license and his HIV status was revealed to the world, he dealt with what many of us fear most: rejection. Professionally and personally he likely felt pain that even the confines of a boxing ring couldn't match. He turned to the internet to research HIV, and that's where he probably first heard of false positive HIV test results...

And that- after everything he'd already been through- sounded pretty damn good.

Tommy also tested positive right around the time that combination therapy was introduced. It's now widely understood that AZT monotherapy, the standard course for treating HIV before "the cocktail" was pretty harsh. So, instead of heeding the advice of his doctor, Time Magazine's 1996 "Man of the Year", Tommy fired him. And started taking vitamins as he attempted to put to rest the hard living that had derailed his career long before he tested positive for HIV.

But with each appearance in public over the last several years, he began to look weaker as he entered his 40s. And as late as February of 2011, he continued to claim that he wasn't HIV positive.

In the end HIV denialism played as big of a role- if not bigger- in his decline than HIV itself.

I wish Tommy had chosen to fight HIV head-on, the same way that he fought opponents in the ring. Instead, he was charmed by the idea that he was living with a harmless virus- and then further charmed

by the idea that he didn’t have a virus in his body at all. And now, at the young age of 44, Tommy Morrison is gone.

And that is very sad.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

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