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Foreman stock on the rise

NEW YORK (AP) — Even before his improbable heavy-weight title victory over a man young enough to be his son, George Foreman was making television commercials for snack food, sneakers and mufflers.

Can new roles — maybe pitching pain medication to his fellow middle-agers — be far behind?

"His stock is way up," said Lloyd Kolmer, who matches celebrities with advertisers. "He just made it for every old fat bald person in the country."

Foreman, two months shy of his 46th birthday, knocked out Michael Moorer, 26, on Saturday and recaptured part of the championship he lost when he was knocked out by Muhammad Ali more than 20 years ago. He became the oldest fighter to win a championship in any weight class.

Foreman had amassed an impressive list of commercials since resuming his boxing career about seven years ago.

The list includes regional or national ads for KFC chicken, Oscar Mayer hot dogs, McDonald's hamburgers, Nike sneakers and Texaco gasoline.

Boxing has seldom produced athletes who are both widely known and are embraced by Madison Avenue for their ability to influence consumers.

But American Data Sports found in a survey of more than

2,400 people last year that Foreman placed 11th out of 77 athletes in terms of consumer recognition and was 17th in terms of influence as a product endorser.

"If he did that well just being a contender, the victory probably increases his endorsement potential geometrically," said Harvey Lauer, president of the leisure research firm in Hartsdale, N.Y.

In a vicious sport, Foreman has cultivated a remarkably warm persona.

"He was in a commercial for Doritos in 1992 with his four sons," said Lynn Markley, a spokeswoman for the tortilla chip brand's owner Frito-Lay Inc. "He is a lovable guy who has a big presence. He delivered for us."

Henry Holmes, a Beverly Hills, Calif., lawyer for Foreman, said his client is appearing in ads for Meineke mufflers and brakes and for Thompson's water sealant.

"We chose George for his credibility and warmth," said Gene Zhiis, a spokesman for Meineke Discount Muffler Shops Inc. in Charlotte, N.C.

Meineke signed him in 1993 and is running four different ads with him that tell customers "you're not going to pay a lot" for good service at the chain, which has 900 outlets in the United States and Canada.

"I guarantee it," Foreman says at the end of each ad, making a fist.

Foreman's contract runs another two years, Zhiis said, and more commercials are planned.

Holmes said Foreman put endorsement talks on hold while he trained for the title fight but that a number of commercial offers have come in since.

Talent brokers said Foreman probably could do a good job pitching pain relievers like baseball's Nolan Ryan did for Advil and tennis' Jimmy Connors did for Nuprin. Others say his 250-pound girth makes him a natural for fast food and his strength could appeal to a pickup truck maker.

They say Foreman could also appeal to older baby boomers who keenly appreciate what he accomplished by defeating a much younger man.

But others say Foreman's triumph at age 45 only shows the quality of top fighters has deteriorated since Muhammad Ali and Rocky Marciano reigned.

"I see him being used in a specific campaign that calls for an older athlete who has come back," said Stephen Disson, who advises companies on signing athlete endorsers. "I don't see him signing any three-year deal."

Capriati quietly returns to tennis

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A relaxed but unsmiling Jennifer Capriati returned quietly to a tournament practice court Monday, concentrating more on her forehand than the people watching her.

The 18-year-old who lost interest in tennis more than a year ago was all business at the Pennsylvania Convention Center, ignoring a crowd watching her as she returned balls to new coach Jose Higueras.

Capriati has a first-round match Wednesday night (7 p.m.) against No. 6 seed Anke Huber in the Virginia Slims of Philadelphia. It is her first appearance in professional tennis since leaving the game and battling a host of personal problems, including drug addiction.

But Monday Capriati looked like she wanted to play again. She returned serves with powerful forehands for more than 30 minutes without a break, stopping occasionally to wipe her forehead.

"I wouldn't say I'm in tip-top shape, but I feel good enough to break the ice," Capriati said in a five-paragraph statement, declining interviews. "I'm not even thinking about winning or losing. Who the opponent is doesn't really matter. I just want to have fun out there."

Capriati fought her way into the pros at age 13 before leaving the game, citing burnout and injuries. A year ago she was arrested for shoplifting and last May was charged with marijuana possession at a hotel in Coral Gables, Fla. She entered a drug rehabilitation center soon afterward.

She said she began practicing seriously in August and had intended to return last month before pulling a muscle.

"In regards to after this tournament and next year I don't know," she said. "I'm just going to take things day by day."

Her colleagues welcomed her return. "I think it's great, she's always been great for tennis," said Amanda Coetzer of South Africa, a 6-1, 6-3 loser to Meilen Tu in the first round Monday. "She's been pretty responsible, from what we hear on the courts, the last few months. She's pretty responsible, she's a fighter."

Capriati's problems set off a debate on the wisdom of allowing players just entering their teens to join the pro tennis tour. Tu, 16, said it would be a mistake to close the ranks to such youngsters.

"There's a lot of mature 14-year-olds out there," Tu said between nervous giggles. "If you're independent, you look at things a different way and not let what people say bother you. People can be really cruel, especially when you lose."

Capriati has a tough first-round opponent in Huber. The 19-year-old defeated Martina Navratilova and Mary Pierce last month on her way to winning the Porsche Grand Prix in Germany.

She could face Lisa Raymond in the second round and top seed Conchita Martinez in the quarterfinals.

Two men die in New York Marathon

NEW YORK (AP) — Two men suffered fatal heart attacks after finishing the New York City Marathon, while a third runner whose heart gave out on the course Sunday fell in front of a doctor and was saved by quick treatment.

The deaths were the second and third in the 25 years of the event. One runner also died in 1984.

The man who was saved, Edward Barry, 47, was "alive, doing well, sitting up and talking ... in good condition," said Pamela Hamilton of Harlem Hospital on Monday.

Dr. Reynolds Trowers was watching the race at the mile 21 medical station, outside Harlem

Hospital, when Barry went down.

"He clearly was in cardiac arrest — no pulse, he wasn't breathing," Trowers said. "I wasn't going to wait for an ambulance — we put him on a stretcher and wheeled him to the hospital."

Trowers ran alongside, giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation while an off-duty Emergency Medical Services technician, Karl McMillan, got atop the runner and did chest compression.

Once inside the hospital, Trowers said, he applied electric shock, which got Barry's heart rhythm restored after the first jolt.

"He came around after 10

minutes," Trowers said. "If he'd had to have waited 15 or 20 minutes for attention there's a good possibility he'd be dead or have permanent brain or organ damage."

"He was in very good physical condition — this was his 20th marathon and he was running seven-minute miles and was near the front of the pack," he said.

One man who died, Pierre Marquette, 27, of France, was stricken about 10 yards beyond the finish line, Ed Gabriel of EMS said. The other, Bernard Rollin, 50, of New York, collapsed about 10 blocks uptown, headed for the family reunion area.