

# Boxers are champing at bit to use dentist's mouthpiece

By MICHELLE LESTER  
The Express-Times

Boxer Evander Holyfield might still have part of his ear left if opponent Mike Tyson wore a mouthpiece designed by a Phillipsburg dentist.

Dr. Jeffrey R. DeMartino has designed a tighter-fitting mouthpiece that does more than protect an athlete, he says. Called the Bengal Bite, the mouthpiece protects the jaw, teeth, neck, head and brain. But it also allows boxers and other athletes to breathe through their mouths while keeping the jaw safely closed.

DeMartino, 36, plans to market the mouth guards nationally and internationally. The trademarked Bengal Bite's patent is pending.

Pro boxers Larry Holmes, Lennox Lewis and other boxers already use them.

The dentist said a Lewis fight at Madison Square Garden illustrated the mouthpiece's

tight, protective fit. As the dentist watched the fight, he saw that it took three attempts by Lewis and others to remove the Bengal Bite when he returned to his corner.

If Mike Tyson stuck that tight-fitting Bengal Bite in his mouth, the former heavyweight champ probably never would have been able to spit out the piece and bite off Holyfield's ear, DeMartino says.

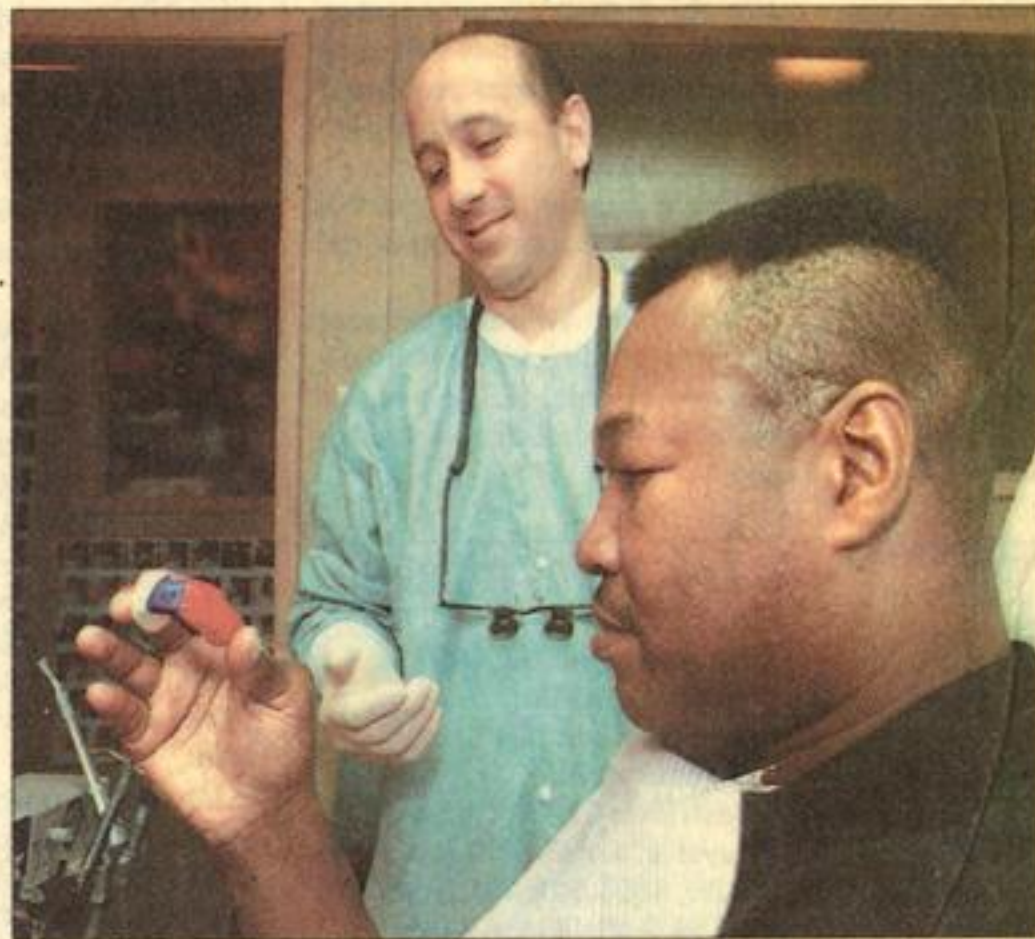
To get a feel for the Bengal Bite, stick your pinkie fingers on each side of the back of your mouth and bite down. You'll find you can breathe easily through the mouth.

DeMartino designed the Bengal Bite to be thicker in the back — opening an airway in the front while safely stabilizing the jaw.

The dentist produces a Bengal Bite line for athletes young and old, amateur and professional. Prices range from \$290 to \$1,200, for the Bengal Bite Pro.

Holmes said Thursday he has three Ben-

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Express-Times photo/JOE GILL

Dr. Jeff DeMartino has made three mouthpieces for boxer Larry Holmes that Holmes uses for training and fights.

# BITE

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He says they protect his mouth and jaw while providing a better bite.

"It's a power bite," Holmes said.

He said he has "no problem breathing" while using the mouthpiece and recommends the guard to other athletes.

Holmes agrees that Tyson would have had a difficult time spitting out the Bengal Bite because it provides suction to the teeth.

"But boxers can find other ways to bite," he said, perhaps using their bottom teeth.

## Been there, done that

As a boxer at Notre Dame University, DeMartino knew about mouth guards that prevent athletes from breathing through their mouths as they bite down on the piece.

He learned early to clench his teeth or risk serious jaw injury from a blow to the face. Yet he had difficulty breathing through his mouthpiece while trying to keep his teeth clenched.

Three weeks into his training, he got popped in the face while holding open his mouth for air. He could not move his jaw for three days despite wearing a standard custom mouthpiece when he was hit.

Today, he has permanent jaw damage.

He later became a dentist, entering his father's practice, where his wife, Dr. Nelida Garcia, also is a dentist.

His dad, Dr. Gaeton J. DeMartino, made standard mouth guards for Holmes since DeMartino was

a boy.

DeMartino's own mouth guard experiences in college boxing and high school wrestling piqued his curiosity — maybe there was a better way to design mouth guards.

He began to ask Holmes and other boxers what they liked and disliked about their mouthpieces.

They, like the college boxer, could not breathe through their mouths while properly using them.

The Bengal Bite resulted. The moniker arose from a Notre Dame boxing tournament called the "Bengal Bouts."

## Word of mouth guard

Word of the new mouthpiece has traveled to sparring partners of Lewis and Holmes and other boxers. Athletes from DeMartino's alma mater, Phillipsburg High School, are using them.

Bengal Bite Laboratories was created downstairs from the dental practice on Roseberry Street four months ago to accommodate current and anticipated demand.

The laboratories will "specifically produce, market and distribute the Bengal Bite mouthpiece line," DeMartino said.

DeMartino wouldn't hazard a guess as to where the Bengal Bite will lead. Right now, he's simply having fun providing protection for a man he characterized as "a childhood hero," and other athletes. "It thrills me to see (Holmes) actually using my mouthpiece in the ring."

Both Holmes and Lewis plan to use their mouth guards in their upcoming 1999 fights against George Foreman and Holyfield, respectively.

And who knows? Maybe Iron Mike will be the dentist's next customer.

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