

KEISHA MORRISEY:
AN INTERVIEW WITH BOXING ROYALTY

By: Rich Bergeron

Utilizing her savvy business sense and vast resources culled from her career in politics and the music and entertainment industry, Keisha Morrisey aspires to be the next Don King of the boxing world. She is already more than halfway there. She can make any rock look like a diamond, and she can move mountains with a simple phone call. It is no wonder she calls herself a boxing empress.

“I’m trying and I will,” she said about her foray into the boxing world where she is drawn from an old family connection to the sport. “My background is in the arts entertainment and sports industry overall, doing management marketing production and publicity. That’s what I decided I want to do. Entertainment and Music is a part of all of our lives, and that’s where all my background lies. As far as the boxing game, my grandfather was a fighter, and I attended fights and since I was a little girl, it’s in my blood, in addition, baseball player, Dave Parker formerly of the Pittsburgh Pirates is a distant relative, so my siblings and I went to games often. I am a hip-hop pioneer, I booked acts dj’s, emcee, talent and promote shows at a local nightclub here in Harlem as a teenager. I am hip-hop, I did a lot in the music business, left that alone, then I got into the film industry, and I left that alone and then went into politics, and I did that for five years. I pretty much finished this year, and now I’m back into the entertainment field, not necessarily in music. I’ve been moving into the boxing game and going to Golden Gloves fights. The bottom line is I know I should have been doing it all along. It’s like my grandfathers are guiding me spiritually toward it, like he’s telling me, ‘Hello, boxing is in your blood, this is where you should be.’”

For a few years she was even a personal assistant to “Iron” Mike Tyson, after she met him at a Run DMC concert when he was still just a prospect and had not yet made his incredible leap to stardom. Their friendship and business relationship blossomed, and she was at his side during some of his best and worst moments in the sport. She still considers him a dear friend and the heavyweight

champ. Her background helps her see the big picture of the boxing world and how much it needs her help and experience. “I began learning this game in the ‘89”, she said. “I foresaw that there was something missing in the boxing game, and I was involved in entertainment at the time, and in the music business.” It’s all about making connections for Morrisey. “I always had a good relationship with people,” she said. “All industries are missing that right now.” She works with a handful of clients who are authors/ play writes, comedians, models, politicians, singers, and businesses. “I do business management, event planning, promotions, and strategizing business plans,” she said. “I decided that I probably wanna do that in the boxing business, too. My family has an event planning company and they do weddings, parties, and sporting events. We book different clients or acts to come in and sing anthems, wedding songs, whatever a client wants. The company is based out of Virginia, and I’m here in New York by myself. I do some event planning through a family run restaurant here, in Harlem. I also manage my niece and nephews in their modeling work.” Outside of her job she said she is primarily a mother who always puts family first. “Yes, that’s it,” she explained. “My son comes first, and everything else comes second.” She also pointed out that her niece and nephews are also training in swimming. “I see them going to the Olympics, they were born in the water,” she said.

Despite her many accomplishments, she’s surprisingly humble about her talents. “It’s second nature for me, and it’s not really a lot to me,” she said. “Publicity is for me, sports writing is a lot for me right now, and that I’ve realized. I can write movie scripts, books, and for my autobiography I have a lot to go. I am working on a book about my political experience here in Harlem. My campaign manager and publicist will be releasing a book in 2007. The last chapter is about my candidacy’s, It’s just about my personal experiences in running for office.” As a strategic move, I’ll allow his book to come out first, and that will be the perfect segue into my book. I haven’t had a long political career, but I just hope somehow to inspire other young people and tell them, ‘You can run.’ How she first

got into politics is an interesting story about identity and wanting to set herself apart from the rusted wheels of the political machine in her neighborhood that always seemed stuck in park. Nothing ever seemed to go forward, and if anything, the wheels sometimes moved in reverse. "I was raised as a Jehovah's Witness and as a Muslim. Politics wasn't necessarily discussed at our dinner table," she said. "I chose the Republican Party, because there was a Democratic club across the street from our housing development. I asked my grandma what that club was, trying to figure out what club I'm gonna go to someday. I said, 'Grandma, what is that?' She told me, 'That's the politic of the community.' When I turned 18, voter registration age, I decided that if to be a Democrat is to be of this community, then I don't want to be associated with that party. In my 18 years on this earth, the community has gone backwards. I want to be a part of the other team and help bring it back up, because this team right now, that ain't workin'." She maintains that her alignment with the Grand Old Party has nothing to do with George W. Bush or Condoleeza Rice. "It's first and foremost grassroots," she said. "There should always be a balance in the community where both parties should be heard on any level. Under Republican leadership, there has been more economic development here in the community, so that's what I identify with more so. Plus, Madame C.J. Walker and other black entrepreneurs in the 1900s were all Republican, independent, and wealthy. That's the part of the game I identify with."

As for the boxing world, Morrissey works primarily with Light Welterweight Francisco "El Gato" Figueroa (14-2, 10 KO's), a rising star in the division who is coming off an impressive victory against Joey Rios (14-1, 6 KO's). The bout decided the New York State Light Welterweight Title, and the next step for Figueroa is a bout on the undercard of James Toney and Samuel Peter's rematch on January 6th. "I'm just an advisor and publicist. We're still in the process of doing a lot of strategizing, and I don't want to take him too far away from training," she said. "I pretty much talk to him not wanting to take focus away from his training, but after Jan 6th it will be full speed ahead."

As far as the marketing media and public relations aspect, we want to work along with his promoter and strategize a game plan as to how I would like to bring him to more of a professional level."

Morrissey sees three levels of promotion and marketing. They are elite, middle, and grassroots. "We just wanna come up with a great marketing strategy and get him involved with product placement and sponsorships," she said. "Frankie is an exciting fighter, and he wants to see nothing less than excitement at his fights, win or lose. He's a great guy. He's very focused, very involved with his career. He was managing himself for a while, and he had a promoter who believed in him as well. He's working with a group who could see his vision and together we will take him to another level. He knows he can't be a professional fighter forever."

As far as expanding her empire, she is still taking baby steps in the boxing world. "I just have Frankie for right now," she said. "Nothing is set in stone. Frankie's the first. I kinda wanna work with him first. I don't want too many boxers anyway. I'm a close adviser and publicist to Ijeoma "The Praise" Egbunine (12-1, 8 KO's)." I am actively beginning to know more female boxers such as female boxing prospect Demi Nguyen (2-1) and plans to eventually add more boxers to her small stable. She also works with Undefeated Female Light Welterweight Chika Nakamura's (4-0, 1 KO) by managing her site on My Space and the DiBella Entertainment's; My Space site is also the result of her handiwork. "I see women in boxing getting really big in the next five years," she said.

"I'm also learning a little about Mixed Martial Arts, and I have a background in karate. Moses Powell and Fred Hamilton trained me, and I made it all the way up to a brown belt, but I didn't like the competitive fighting aspect, so I didn't pursue it. But, the discipline was great for me. As far as MMA catching up with boxing, one of my mentors and colleagues Eddie Goldman, is teaching me more about it. I'll see. I have some Japanese friends who introduced myself and my son to the Pride Fighting Championships, and I have a couple tapes around. I was kinda amazed, but at the same time I liked it. It's definitely different. They kick and hit

and punch people till they start bleeding. I'm not sure I prefer it over boxing. Boxing is my favorite sport. If it is becoming pretty much equal, now I know I need to get into the boxing game to bring it out more. Particularly on a grassroots level as well."

She made particular mention of boxing's lack of marketing to the African American and Latin communities. "Somewhere along the way, we're not being included in marketing strategies and the African American and Latin communities have to know more, and it's important that we know who the fighters are first," she said. "That's why I say Don King is the master at promoting, and right now probably what the African American community relates to is Don King. Unless you're a Don King fighter, I guess we're just missing the message. What Don King brings to the table is excitement. He is boxing; I don't think anyone will ever be able to take his place, except me. I respect Bob Arum and Cedric Kushner, and I like what De La Hoya's doing, but nobody can do it like Don King. He's the master."

The best part of her work is the freedom she enjoys. "That I can have fun and I make my own rules," she noted about what she loves most about working as her own boss with important people. "More importantly, it's not stressful. It's very time consuming, and I have to sacrifice a lot, but it keeps me young."

The Fresh Air Fund is something she and Figueroa both have in common. "Unlike a lot of kids from the inner city, we both identify with a lot of travel, and we were both very blessed to be out of NYC," she said. "I understand this may be our home, but you have to travel to promote yourself."

She is excited to work with Figueroa to help him promote the program that provides city kids host families

To spend time in the country and get off the busy, and sometimes dangerous urban streets. "He has a big vision for such a little person," she said about Figueroa. "He's gonna stop at nothing short of fulfilling it. He's very humbled. He wants to give back, and he reached out to The Fresh Air Fund to ask what he can do. We're coming up with

something to do for them. I just want to make sure we package it the right way."

She credits the program for helping her understand a different culture. "For me, The Fresh Air Fund introduced me to a lot of things I wouldn't be able to do in the city," she said. "My grandmother was teaching me a little about the old-fashioned perspective. I hardly ever played outside. I cooked, I sewed, and I read everything. There was no real hardcore domestic work, but I was always very intelligent for my age, and even traveled at an early age to school by myself. With my host family I learned how to build a barn, garden and pick fresh fruit, drive tractor trailer, feed the animals, groom horses and milk cows, I even met Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette." She explained that a member of her host family handled all of the entertainment security that came to the Cheshire Fair, and she was ecstatic to get that first early brush with a star of the music industry. "Even that experience was great for me, and in one of our first conversations we were talking about our experiences in The Fresh Air Fund," she said about that connection she shares with her fighter. "We keep it real with each other, and we encourage open communication. It lets me know what's on his mind, and I listen very well. It helps me to package him to make him a greater fighter than what he already is. That comes along with a great training team and good people around you."

"My ultimate goal is probably to become a promoter and real estate tycoon. I either want to become the first female congresswoman in Harlem or a promoter in boxing entertainment and business woman," she said. "However, as long as our current Congressman Charlie Rangel is alive, and as long as Don King is alive, I will continue to learn from them, and hopefully get their blessings, and then they can pass their torch to me and I will keep that torch lit." Though she is somewhat uncertain of exactly where the future will lead her, she does have definitive plans. "I do have that mapped out, in the long-term as well as for right now. I just want to be an event planner and publicist to the stars," she said for now. "Then eventually, I'll either parlay that back into a political career, and then maybe as a

promoter. Politics being the last option. I made a great mark, and my name is already out there. No matter how much I manage to stray from it, I always end up right back there. I've been working with the luminaries, too. It's all the same thing. It's big business."

Though she has dreams of influencing the boxing world in a big way, she has already made quite a difference in the music business. "That's where people would really recognize me from," she reported. "I am the founder of Mobb Deep, that's my pet project. That's my baby. They have yet to reach their potential as rap artists. They are still babies in the game." She's also worked with Melba Moore, a Tony Award winning singer and actress, just to name a few. She runs her own company, Harlem Entertainment, too. There isn't much Keisha Morrisey hasn't done in her business life.

A couple hours after the questions were done, I figured out why she is so good with people. She is a natural born talker with countless tales about her colorful life, and it's easy to get locked into a long conversation with her. What makes it even easier is realizing that she truly does have the characteristics of an empress, but in her case her power lies in the sheer volume of her class and confidence. She doesn't need any army to give her clout. All she needs to do is pick up the phone and make a call, and she can sweet-talk anyone into working with her. That soft, understanding voice has unlimited potential to reshape the boxing world as we know it.

Watch out, Don King, for this empress may soon claim your throne.