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Dramatic Publishing

THE OPPONENT



BY BRETT NEUEU

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THE OPPONENT

Drama. By Brett Neveu. Cast: 2m. *The Opponent* takes a look at the world of boxing from the perspective of a small-time boxing gym owner, Tremont “Tre” Billiford, and a young up-and-comer, Donell Fuseles. Donell seeks motivation from Tre for his upcoming fight with rising star Jas Dennis. As Tre and Donell trade jabs, Tre attempts to keep Donell’s sights on the fight and not on Donell’s dreams of a lavish career. Donell reacts with frustration, insulting both Tre’s decaying gym and decision-making. Tre finds a way to channel Donell’s frenetic energy and assures Donell he’ll see him later that night after his big win. Time shifts forward five years, and the fight with Jas Dennis is now (seemingly) buried in the past. Tre’s mental ability has begun to crumble, and Donell, showing up unannounced, questions Tre’s advice given to him five years previously. The broken men both accuse the other of causing the failures that define their lives while they approach the fight that will prove who truly is the champ. “Concisely captures the dirty and disillusioning business of growing into adulthood—a path that sadly forces us to recognize the fallible humanity of our most respected mentors.” (*Theatremania*) *Unit set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: OA6.*

“A GREAT NEW PLAY THAT DANCES, PARRIES AND, MOST IMPORTANT, LANDS SOME KILLER PUNCHES.”

—CHRIS JONES, *CHICAGO TRIBUNE*

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BRETT NEVEU



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“First produced by A Red Orchid Theatre Company, Chicago, Oct. 22 to Dec. 15, 2012. Transferred to 59E59, New York City, produced by Bisno Productions and A Red Orchid Theatre, July 31 to Sept. 7, 2014, directed by Karen Kessler.”

The Opponent was first produced by A Red Orchid Theatre Company in Chicago from Oct. 22 to Dec. 15, 2012.

Cast:

Donell Fuseles.....Kamal Angelo Bolden
Tre Billiford Guy Van Swearingen

Production:

DirectorKaren Kessler
Artistic Director Kirsten Fitzgerald
Managing Director Rebecca Eaton Creech
Lighting Mike Durst
Set Design Joey Wade
Sound Joe Court
Fight DirectionJohn Tovar
Boxing Trainer Al Ortiz
Dialect Coach.....Kate DeVore
Costume Design.....Myron Elliott
Stage ManagerChrista Van Baale

The Opponent

CHARACTERS

DONELL Fuseles: male, tall, African American, 20 and 25.

Tremont “TRE” Billiford: male, compact, Caucasian, 45 and 50.

TIME

Present decade; ACT I and ACT II are five years apart.

PLACE

The training ring at Rock and Anvil Boxing Gym in Lafayette, Louisiana.

“The fight is won or lost far away from witnesses—behind the lines, in the gym, and out there on the road, long before I dance under those lights.”

—Muhammad Ali

The Opponent

ACT I

(Lights up on a trainer's boxing ring. Near one side of the ring is a low metal bench. On the bench is a worn jump rope, a black nylon duffle bag and a fraying white towel. On the corner of the turnbuckles is a funnel, tube and spit bucket contraption, duct-taped to the post. DONELL, in his workout clothes, stands in the ring. He shifts as he stands. TRE, in sweatpants and T-shirt, stands near DONELL. TRE adjusts DONELL's boxing gloves.)

DONELL. Naw, I'm not—

TRE. Yeah, jitter—

DONELL. My hands, I ain't—

TRE. You forget I just wrapped your hands?

DONELL. Just energy—

(TRE and DONELL begin their training workout.)

TRE. You gonna heave—

DONELL. No—

TRE. I heard you heaved, a week back—

DONELL. That was Chad-o that heaved into the damn bucket.

TRE. Naw, yeah?

DONELL. It was Chad-o Desille. From after his spar here with Ty Jems.

TRE. Here?

DONELL (*smiling*). Yeah, you need to jog your noggin'.

TRE. Yeah, OK.

DONELL. Chad-o was all (*Barf sound.*) blahhhggg—

TRE (*smiling*). Fuckin' Chad-o.

(*TRE shifts away from DONELL a bit.*)

TRE (*cont'd*). Move, yeah, OK—

(*DONELL puts his gloves up.*)

DONELL. It's just concentration—

TRE. Concentration?

DONELL. That's what I mean—it ain't jitters, it's *focus*—

TRE. We gonna jump later.

DONELL. Yeah, OK, but just a bit of jumping—

TRE. See about it—

DONELL. It's good, it's fine—

TRE. Check your ankle—

DONELL. Ankle's good, I said.

TRE. You gotta think—

DONELL. It's been good for this long, ain't no problems.

TRE. You say—

DONELL. Ankle's fine, nothing wrong with it.

TRE. Check and see. If there's a twinge in the foot—

DONELL. There ain't no twinge.

TRE. Yeah, OK. Up and—up—

(*DONELL shifts around in the ring.*)

TRE (*cont'd*). Over—

(DONELL shifts opposite.)

DONELL. They tell you about the pay-per-view?

TRE. What?

DONELL. They tell you it could be accessed? Pay-per-view, middle card? Gonna show it over at Muddle's, two bucks at the door.

TRE. Now up, over—

(TRE moves away from DONELL.)

TRE *(cont'd)*. How long we got before you go?

DONELL. Nick ain't here till, what, in awhile—

TRE. Nick went on back to Red's?

DONELL. Yeah, back to his office down at Red's.

TRE. He got an office there?

DONELL. Just a room, more like, just where he puts his satchel or whatever.

TRE *(laughs)*. "Satchel?"

DONELL. Whatever it is, OK?

TRE. You likin' it over at Red's gym?

DONELL. It's good, yeah, I like it all right. Been training over there the past couple months with Pete Nemicheck.

TRE. Pete's good.

DONELL. Yeah.

TRE. Crowded over there?

DONELL. Sometimes, but they got the space. Plus when fighters see me with Nick and Pete? They shove over and give me a wide berth.

TRE. So what time they have you up this evenin'?

DONELL. Seven or seven-thirty, between seven, seven-thirty.

You should knock off early—

TRE. It's Thursday, I got five fighters, Thursday—

DONELL. Have Marcus cover for you.

TRE. I got five fighters—

DONELL. Marcus and Ginny can cover, you knock off—

TRE. I got five—

DONELL. I'm sayin' you should step out—

TRE. You think that been OK for you? Back, what, for you on a Thursday? Me out the door for some fight?

(A beat.)

DONELL. Hell no.

TRE. Then there. I got five fighters. Today's Thursday.

DONELL. OK, but, come if you can.

TRE. Have to leave this afternoon to come—

DONELL. Sure, but, if you can, then do.

(A beat.)

TRE. I know who Jas Dennis is.

DONELL. Sure—

TRE. *You* know who Jas Dennis is?

DONELL. It's me there with him, so sure I know.

TRE. Nick and Pete and you talk all about Jas Dennis?

DONELL. Back and forth, yeah, we all talked and I been watching tapes, so, yeah, I know all about him, yeah.

TRE. Your third pro fight—come out strong. Be wary.

DONELL. Wary of Jas Dennis isn't—

TRE. You always be wary, Donell—

DONELL. Jas needs to be wary of me—

TRE. You hit him—

DONELL. Hit Jas low, I know that—

TRE. You go out and punch at an oil drum, an oil drum is low.

DONELL. Yeah, OK—

TRE. Oil drum is low and round just like Jas and compact, seems small but he's wide, shoulders like he's haulin' cinderblocks stacked two, three up. (*Beat.*) We should work with the pads.

DONELL. We could, yeah—

TRE. Three-minute reps, up high and down low—

DONELL. I remember your reps—

TRE. You remember, shit you *better* remember unless two months away makes you forget—

DONELL. How you think I ever forget?

TRE. Meaning?

DONELL. You don't let nobody forget.

TRE. So we doing pads?

DONELL. We could, yeah, I suppose.

TRE. What, you gonna wear yourself out?

DONELL. Don't want to lose my concentration.

TRE. How's trainin' gonna make you lose?

DONELL. No, I mean, like sex before a fight.

TRE (*laughs*). I ain't askin' for sex, I'm only askin' for reps.

DONELL. OK, OK—

TRE (*kids*). I didn't know you saw me that way, Donell.

DONELL (*serious*). Enough, I get it, but you get *my* point?

(*A beat.*)

TRE. You don't like no kidding.

DONELL. I get the joke but I said you get my point?

TRE. I'd think you gettin' your energy up would be somethin' good for ya, at least with fights in the past—

DONELL. This ain't a fight like those, this is me and *Jasper Turner Dennis*.

TRE (*still teasing*). The full name, you serious.

(*DONELL backs up from TRE.*)

DONELL. Look—

TRE. Look what?

DONELL. I was hopin' you would just want to talk and do this lite—

TRE. Don't think I'm doin' anything, don't think I'm pushin' to get somethin'.

DONELL. Yeah, OK—

TRE. You got a fight, I know. It's a big fight. And beyond, yeah, OK, it's big anywhere else, too, not just for you in your head. So you're sensitive. OK to be sensitive this early, but you got all day to calm down, so you can lighten up. And I don't care about what you think I care about.

DONELL. What you think I think you care about?

TRE. You think I care about you decidin' to train at Red's.

DONELL. Nick said it's been two years I been with him—

TRE. Fuck Nick. I'm fine with Nick. I fuckin' set you up with Nick two years back, didn't I? I'm fuckin' *friends* with Nick. Didn't I have him in here back then on another fuckin' Thursday and didn't Nick watch and listen to me when I said for him to watch you? Didn't you hear me talkin' you up to him and now it's two years gone, and he's still pushin'

you, gettin' you over with Pete Nemecheck at Red's and hell if didn't I see it back then and here it is, now, look—you and Jas Dennis tonight? Didn't I see all that comin'? I know how the fuckin' ladder works. *(Pause.)* I was teasing you, was all I was doing. Don't apply meaning.

DONELL. You right.

TRE. You just sensitive. All your jitters—

DONELL. Yeah, OK.

(TRE moves ringside and grabs a set of hand pads. He slides the pads over his hands.)

TRE. So three minute rep—

DONELL. I ain't doin' it fast—

TRE. Just to get the heart up, like a coffee.

DONELL. Yeah, OK—

(TRE holds his hands low. DONELL hits them low. After thirty seconds, TRE holds his hands high, and DONELL hits them high. This continues for three minutes.)

TRE. Move, don't rush—

DONELL. Mm—

TRE *(with the hits)*. Pop. Pop. Pop.

DONELL. Pop—

TRE. Keep it smooth, tight in—

DONELL. Mm—

TRE. Get your heart rate up, Donell—

DONELL. Yeah—

TRE. Keep your arms, keep your arms relaxed—

DONELL. Hard to talk—

TRE. What?

DONELL. Hard to talk with this—

TRE. When?

DONELL. Thought we were—

TRE. It's a workout—

DONELL. We were talkin', takin' it slow—

TRE. You said you wanted—

DONELL. No, I said I ain't—

TRE. Up—

DONELL. I thought—

TRE. Then, OK, take it down—

DONELL. Seems dumb taking reps down.

TRE. My point.

DONELL. No reason for reps if it's down.

TRE. Then pick up the pace.

DONELL. Yeah, OK—

TRE. But not too much, you're right.

DONELL. Mm—

TRE. Save your juice—

DONELL. Just up a little more—

(DONELL picks up the pace of his hits.)

TRE. Whoa, whoa—

DONELL. It's OK, I got it—

TRE. Keep it tight, arms loose, arms loose—

DONELL. Mm—

TRE. Watch your stance, watch your legs—

(DONELL adjusts his leg posture.)

TRE (*cont'd*). Watch your base, watch your base, then up.

DONELL. You been sayin' that same—

TRE. You watch your base better, then I ain't gotta say the same.

DONELL. Yeah, OK—

TRE. Now down—

DONELL. Mm.

TRE. What time you leave?

DONELL. What?

TRE. What time you gotta leave here?

DONELL. For what, later?

TRE. For the fight, yeah.

DONELL. Nick wants us there early.

TRE. Like, then, what?

DONELL. Don't know, by four?

TRE. Maybe two?

DONELL. Ask him when he comes—

TRE. Don't matter, two or four.

DONELL. Nick and me'll go back over to my place, grab
some whatever, get my stuff and go.

TRE. Arms relaxed, c'mon—

DONELL. Yeah, OK.

TRE. Pop—pop—

DONELL. You could do that drive over to New Orleans to see
the fight, it ain't long—

TRE. I said I got five fighters tonight—

DONELL. You and me been on that drive before, it's quick—

TRE. You need to take into account—

DONELL. Do what?

TRE. Take into account your mind-state. It'll seem long, I bet, that drive, longer in your mind-state—OK pick it up—

(DONELL begins to punch faster.)

DONELL. Drive's gonna seem the same.

TRE. Gonna seem long.

DONELL. It'll seem quick, if anything, way my mind-state is. Quick like—

(DONELL throws some quick jabs.)

TRE. Stay loose, c'mon, you can go fast but keep loose—

DONELL. Like that, mm mm—

(DONELL throws more quick jabs.)

TRE. Watch your stance. *(Pause.)*—OK, back—

(DONELL moves back, toward a corner of the ring.)

DONELL. You see? Nick got himself a new ride.

(DONELL stretches his neck.)

TRE. Saw it, yeah.

DONELL. Black and high, interior with everything leather—

TRE. Mm.

DONELL. He's drivin' him and me to New Orleans in that.

TRE. I ain't been in it.

DONELL. You seen it, though, yeah?

TRE. Parked on the side of here last week.

DONELL. Last week?