

LAS VEGAS (Reuter) - Mike Tyson proved very little on Saturday night except that he could seduce 16,736 people into spending a record \$15 million to see for themselves if three years in prison had made him less than ``the baddest man on the planet."

In addition to the on-site curious who paid \$200-\$1500 a ticket, fans throughout the world paid about \$45 each to pipe the scheduled 10-round fight into their homes on pay-per-view television, despite universal predictions that Tyson's opponent would crumple in two or three rounds at best.

And Peter McNeeley lived up to the promise that had made him a 17-1 underdog. McNeeley was knocked down about seven seconds into the first round and not long after that a second time that so impressed his manager-trainer, Vinny Vecchione, that he jumped into the ring to end the bout at one minute, 29 seconds of the round.

Vecchione, who has a brain-damaged son, had said all week that he would not let McNeeley, 26, get hurt.

Vecchione said the speed of Tyson's punches was the chief reason he stopped the scheduled 10-round bout.

But Tyson was still clearly rusty, even against an untalented opponent, often missing with combinations as well as his once-vaunted left hook.

Vecchione's move has cost him, at least for now, his \$179,820 cut of McNeeley's \$700,000 payday.

Marc Ratner, the Executive Director of the Nevada State Athletic Commission, said he would hold up Vecchione's money.

``We want to talk to him (Vecchione) to see why he stopped the fight when he he did," Ratner said.

It is unclear what that has to do with whether the fighter should continue.

It seems the question of whether McNeeley would have been risking serious harm if he had continued depended Saturday night, at least, on the angle of the viewer.

Some ringsiders agreed with the fans, whose boos lasted longer than the fight, that it had been stopped too soon.

But Tyson, released from prison last March after serving a three-year sentence for rape, caught McNeeley near his corner with a right uppercut that sent McNeeley down on his knees facing his corner.

As referee Mills Lane was motioning Tyson to a neutral corner, Vecchione jumped into the ring.

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