



George "Monk" Foreman III

EDITOR'S NOTE George "Monk" Foreman III is an entrepreneur, boxing trainer and coach, and the son of legendary businessman and former two-time heavyweight champion George Foreman Sr. In addition to being his father's business manager for seven years, Foreman III spent his entire youth working at the George Foreman Youth & Community Center, where he not only developed the habit of giving back, but also honed his ability to effectively use boxing as a platform to effect change within the community. After earning a degree in kinesiology from Rice University, Foreman III went on to pursue his own professional boxing career in 2009 and finished with a perfect 16-0 record. In 2013, Foreman III founded a luxury boxing fitness gym called EverybodyFights. His mission is to use his background in boxing as a platform to teach the mental laws of fighting to as many people as possible. In 2013, he also published his first book, *The Fighting Spirit*, which includes his original 12 "Fight Laws." His next book, *The Mindful Fighter*, will be released later in 2019.

COMPANY BRIEF Headquartered in Boston and founded in 2013, EverybodyFights (everybodyfights.com) received a series-A investment from Breakaway in 2016 and is currently starting its series B round for nationwide expansion. A boxing fitness brand founded by George Foreman III, EverybodyFights provides award-winning group class programming based on a professional fighter's training regimen. EverybodyFights has critically-acclaimed flagship locations in Boston, New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Lexington, Kentucky. EverybodyFights' BOX program allows select third-party fitness clubs to open their own EverybodyFights franchise inside their current facilities and deliver boutique-style boxing fitness circuit and bags classes in as little as 800 to 2,000 square feet. EverybodyFights is set to add at least 12 more BOX franchises over the next 18 months, and a total of 20 gyms by 2020.

Fulfilling a Passion

An Interview with George "Monk" Foreman III, Founder, EverybodyFights

Did creating EverybodyFights provide a way to fulfill your passion for teaching boxing?

EverybodyFights is certainly a passion for me that stems from my love of boxing. If there's one thing I would ever do for free for the rest of my life, it would be teaching boxing. I absolutely love it and that's never going to stop. EverybodyFights gives me an outlet to do that, whether I'm getting paid \$100 an hour, \$1,000 an hour, or doing it for free. That's my passion and I'm so glad to have EverybodyFights to help me fulfill that passion.

With so many gym offerings in the market, how is EverybodyFights different?

I would be lying if I said that I came up with differentiators and target markets when I first started. I was just trying to pay my rent.

When I was a pro boxer, I would spend three or four hours before and after my training coaching others for free and actually losing money doing it. It was then that I thought, if I can train people and make \$35,000 a year, I would do it in a heartbeat, even though I had the potential to box for two or three more years and earn big, million-dollar paychecks. That was my mindset.

I was visiting my friend (and now business partner) Anthony "AJ" Rich in Boston. He said, "This would be a great market for a boxing gym." It was his idea originally, but he didn't know it was on my mind. I thought to myself, "Wow, I can't believe he said that."

When I first opened a nonprofit gym in Houston, we would charge you your age in dollars per year for your membership fee, and we were losing money every month. So, my dad would subsidize the gym. People in Boston were paying \$130 or \$140 a month and the gyms were dirty and sweaty. My gym was much nicer. We had opened a really nice, luxury boxing gym. I was always a cleanliness snob because of where I come from. In our gym, my dad always said, "I don't care if we're about to go out of business, we're still going to clean the floor." That is what was behind the original concept.

I thought I was going to be able to find a location and open in Boston within six months. However, it sometimes takes six months to just get a permit in Boston. In the end, it took me a full year to find a location, three months to secure it, and then six months to build it out. So it was almost two years before I opened and, by the end of it, I kept adding on. In the tech

world, they call this feature creep; for me, I felt like I needed this gym to be a place where I could still train to fight if I wanted to, so it had to have everything.

I had used 24-Hour Fitness, Lifetime Fitness, Athletic Republic as well as sports performance training for football players, various recovery techniques, tech equipment, yoga and Pilates, and even outdoors training. I wanted to figure out how I could put all of this under one roof.

I also love luxury amenities and eating healthy. Then I needed physical therapy to stay healthy, so I wanted to include that as well, but I needed to find enough space. I realized it was going to cost a lot of money so I had to raise a lot of money. That took around two years and we finally ended up with this behemoth of a boxing gym, 14,000 square feet, in which I could do my entire training camp without leaving those doors.

That was how it all came together. I had planned on going back into boxing and actually tried twice with training camps after we opened. I just could not make enough time to train properly, so I gave it up. It will always be in the back of my mind, but I finally had to say, "You know what, I'm just going to open a business for boxing, as opposed to actually continuing my boxing career."

When you opened the gym in Boston, did you know the concept would be replicable and would work in other cities?

I didn't know; once again, I was just trying to pay my bills. I had leased a gym that was around \$400,000 a year in rent for the first year and I was sleeping on the floor. I'd wake up, go in the communal restrooms, clean myself as if I was homeless, which is fine; I was homeless – and I would sell presale memberships at \$400. I sold 600 of these memberships. That was all I focused on.

In my previous life, I worked for my dad. After the success of the George Foreman Grill, many people sent us their inventions and business ideas. Many people had great concepts, but they didn't know how to plan for success. They thought their idea was the best, but didn't think how it might scale to 50 million units. They didn't plan for that. It requires consistency, branding and simplicity and people struggle with all these things. So this was always on my mind because I didn't want to be that guy who used to send me their great idea but who had not planned for success.

Like I said, I was just trying to pay the bills, but while I was doing that, I also planned for success and worked on trademarks and protecting everything else we do that is proprietary such as our training secrets and anything else we could find that makes what we are doing special. I was also paying attention to the details, like how we could make every orange color in the facility consistent. That's really hard to do because you have to figure out how it looks on canvas versus brick, versus other materials, so we were always looking at the details.

Is it difficult to maintain consistency as you scale from seven locations to another ten?

There is only so much you can control in terms of culture and vibe, but I do know that a big part of our business, especially being into boxing, is about vibe and what you feel like when you're in the gym. If I can replicate the facility, that is an important piece, and I can do that. I don't know if I can do it for the same budget every time, but I can replicate the facility, for sure, even though that has been harder to do because of the difference in available materials and contractors in different cities.

You also can't completely replicate the people, but I can always find people who are passionate about boxing. They were, most likely, doing what they now do for us for free before, so I can replicate that. Then, I can make sure that they cue the movements the same way and teach the class the same way and wear the same clothes. I give them many options to choose from, but they must all have EBF somewhere on them. Then I can make sure they come and get fully immersed in what we do. I can do all these things.

Running a gym is part facility and part people, just like a church. So we will end up recruiting more of a psychographic than a demographic. Those people are out there. There are a lot of passionate people who in another life would have been football coaches or ministers or preachers at a church, who have a passion about fitness and who I can show how to teach a class. I may have to teach them how to cue a lunge, but I don't have to teach them how to create that vibe of a person walking in and feeling motivated and then making the members feel comfortable when they walk in and excited and motivated while they are in the class. I can replicate that.

The concept of boxing may be intimidating for some. How do you structure the programs to make members feel safe and comfortable at any skill level?

Anyone can come to an EverybodyFights gym. There is not one class that is intimidating – I made sure we wouldn't have that. For some, this might be a detriment, but we don't have that, number one. Number two, since we have a four-part class series, you can run, you can do yoga, you can do Pilates in its own room, you can do circuit training, you can box, or you can workout in the open gym. You can do all these things. Then you can do small group training with just six people per class, which is included in your membership. You can also have one-on-one training, so we give you a reason to come to the gym every day.



Working out at EverybodyFights, Boston FiDi

We also have the ability to meet our members at the level they are at.

Are you concerned about what other gyms in the area might be doing or do you focus more on your members?

We definitely focus more on our members. In my gym, it is all about what my customers are saying and what they are responding to. When one of our members has been coming for six months strong and I suddenly hear about them falling off, I want to know what happened. I like to say they are co-creating our product because we have to recreate our product, our brand and our messaging with the client every year.

Has it been difficult to retain talent in an industry that is traditionally known for high turnover?

I hate to say this because they may become famous last words, but we have zero turnover; zero, and the fitness industry is notorious for turnover. Do we fire people for being rude at the front desk, or stealing? Yes, but we try to keep people through all their indiscretions as long as they are not criminal and don't put people at risk. So we just don't have turnover.

I try to make sure that I'm always one step ahead in making sure the opportunities are there for our people as they grow. That's hard to do and is a lot of pressure, and we are not always successful. People may be able to make more money elsewhere, but we ask if they would be happier or even as happy there, and we have to make sure the answer is no. Although you cannot always be competitive in all categories, creating an environment where people are happy to come to work is the one element of competition that is fully within your power.

The more that we work on culture and making sure it feels like a family, the lower the turnover for the staff and the more they want to be close to those familiar faces who have become friends with whom they hangout. That, in turn, helps with the retention of our gym

members. When they fall off after a couple of months, they're not saying, "Oh, I've got to get back at that workout;" they're saying, "I've got to go see Chris," and Chris has been there for six years, so that is an important element.

In terms of opportunity, we have realized that in our industry, once you are about 37 you are burned out and you are looking for a big check. You're looking to be on TV, and those opportunities are so limited and they are not even that much fun. Knowing this, we choose to pay more for leadership. As opposed to other companies who pay hundreds of dollars per class, we choose to make a commitment to our people by giving them a salary, benefits, conveniences, vacation stipend, and equity. In short, we strive to reward the things that support the community.

As EverybodyFights has grown, has it been difficult for you to stay deeply involved in all aspects of the business?

My business partner, who is the CEO, really runs the company. To say it is all about me is disrespectful to him and also disrespectful to our staff and to the energy we put into the concept. People often questioned my role as being something that would hold us back from growth because I could not be everywhere at all times, so I've tried to make myself obsolete, and so my people keep me honest.

Alex is a good example. He has been with us since before we started. He is the best. He has managed gyms and managed all of our content. Alex is also the one that calls me out when I make a mistake to make sure that I am respecting the EBF culture. He is more me, as it relates to EverybodyFights, than I am now.

Knowing that Alex can become more me than I used to be – and Nicole, who has a Ph.D., and is a lot more organized than I am – can become more me than I used to be, is reassuring. And knowing that they, along with a few other people, are training the people who are the future leaders, I don't really have a lot of



Heavy bags at EverybodyFights, New York

concerns as to whether we can grow. It's just more about moving too fast. We'll have to figure that out, probably with some errors but, at the right pace, we can keep scaling this.

I've also learned that humor is the most sure indicator of connection and understanding. When I can call my people at the front desk and they tell me about something and we can both laugh at how crazy it is, I know we are still connected. The minute I lose this and I can't relate any longer, I'll be fearful.

At what point did you know that this concept was going to work?

I never knew it was going to work; I just believed in it. I have this overwhelming belief that I need to do this and, if I just keep pushing, it will work out, but I don't know that it will.

But I can tell you the time when I knew I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. It hit me. We opened four gyms in 14 months. We opened Boston in February 2017, New York in July, Chicago in August, and then Lexington, Kentucky, in June 2018. I was going on tour visiting all the gyms as I do now, and every single time I would visit one of the gyms, a woman and her husband would come in. They looked the same as they did before, but had a totally new attitude. They said, "Thank you so much for bringing this here; you don't know what this is doing for me. I've never belonged to a gym. I never worked out." They would point towards their brain, and explain the way the gym was helping them with their anxiety and self-image and say, "The way this is helping me mentally is completely changing my life." They would go on and on. This motivated me to say, "I've got to do another one."

We just opened a gym in Philadelphia, but I didn't even see it until it was two months into operation. I didn't train the staff, but I trained the team who trained the staff. I saw the trainers wearing an EverybodyFights T-shirt and that they had their swag and all of this confidence. That was when I said, "This is my gym." Then,

sure enough, a lady like the one I was telling you about, comes up to me and tells me the same exact story the other lady did. It was really bizarre.

Many would think this product lends itself more to men, but you're seeing women also enjoying it and seeing the benefits?

I think men and women are experiencing the same benefits, maybe for different reasons or to a different extent. I know men and women are different, but I think a lot of us are impoverished in power or in the perception that we have power, especially if we are not getting what we want. The gyms seem to foster this whole idea of empowerment. I think women are more vocal about feeling this and that they like to do things that make them feel empowered. Men may feel the same way; we just won't tell you. In fact, sometimes the less empowered men feel, the tougher they act. I think there is a similar thing going on with the men and the women. I just think it plays out differently.

With an undefeated professional boxing record, was it difficult to stop fighting?

It was hard, but I've come very close to being in bad shape from boxing. However, pushing myself and committing to something makes you want to stay with it. Of the people that I was competitive with, and maybe even better than, one of them is now heavyweight champion of the world. I'm not sure I could beat him now, but I know I could have beat him then. When I see that, it does make me want to come back. However, knowing what I know today about head injuries, I don't think I'm the same guy I used to be before boxing. I have a lot more bravery and a lot of other intangibles that I'm glad to have, but my brain is not what it used to be. Knowing what six more years would have done in that regard makes me think I'm okay having given it up. I tried to come back a couple of times, but every time I was just about to go back and felt I had to do one more fight for charity, I would look my hardest and find

one guy in the boxing division that I just didn't want any piece of. I think if you can identify that person, you don't need to box. That person has never been one of the champions, but he's like a pit bull and I didn't want any part of him.

Some may feel that since you come from a successful family with a famous father, it would have been an easy journey. Did you face many challenges?

There are a lot of things that are easy; but when I say easy, that doesn't mean I got them without effort. I got a BMW my freshman year in college just for being a good kid; but you're supposed to be a good kid. So, yeah, there is a lot of stuff that was easy.

My dad had trained me to be a fighter for five or six years. I kept asking myself, "Why would he let me do this?" but I think he just wanted to make sure I didn't get killed doing it.

We were successful with my professional boxing career, but I used to train six days a week and sometimes seven. Finally, I said, "Dad, I want to do this on my own." I was worried that we weren't going to have the same relationship anymore and we had been best friends, attached at the hip my whole life in a way that seemed like more than just father/son. Dad said, "I won't let you do it by yourself. I promised your mama that I was going to protect you." I thought about this and said, "Well, how about I just don't do it?" and we both agreed that maybe it was time to take a break from boxing.

Then I decided to open this gym and he told me, "I don't think you should do that. You're signing a lease, you're taking on expense. You do not need to take risks like this to be successful, so you don't have to do this, son". But I had my mind made up and told him I was going to do it. He was so concerned for me and was saying anything he could to get me not to do it. I did it anyway and there was no way I could go back to him for help, so I spent every dime I had.

The first gym cost \$1.3 million, which I did not have in the bank. I had to beg for it, and only took a \$40,000 a year salary for the first two years in order to pay it back, even though the gym was generating hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. This is a true story and the only option I would have had if it didn't work was to go back home and start from scratch, but there was not a bone in my body that ever considered that to be an option. That's just who I am and it is probably a flaw.

Was there a time when your father acknowledged that you had made it?

We didn't talk about it at all for a long time. I finally called him and was asking him a question, because he is my leader from a boxing standpoint. There was this new innovative bag that had six pads everywhere, but I felt like this was not real boxing. However, I was still considering putting it in the gym because it looked cool and beginners loved it.

We had a talk about it and he said, "Stop being so uptight. If it gets people to start boxing, that's a start." I think that was the point at which we just got past whether I was going to do this or not; and, like when he was training me to box, it became more about letting me do it while making sure I was successful and didn't get hurt. ●