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Jermain Taylor and Arkansas Health Initiative Make Winning Combination

LITTLE ROCK (July 18, 2005) — Boxing's heir apparent Jermain Taylor unseated 12-year titleholder Bernard Hopkins to become the new world middleweight champion Saturday night. What the world is now seeing is something Arkansas has known for quite some time - Jermain is not only a world champion, he's a world class gentleman.

Taylor has long been an advocate of his birthplace – Little Rock, Arkansas. He has touted the state not only as his home, but the place that gave him his boxing start. It seems only fitting that he has been sought out by countless in-state organizations to become their spokesperson. While having been approached by some of the best, Taylor has landed with one campaign that is near to his heart, the Arkansas Department of Health's Stamp Out Smoking (SOS) campaign.

Taylor joined the SOS team in July 2004 and has served as the campaign's front person by starring in an anti-tobacco television spot and serving as the face of the recently re-designed Web site, stampoutsmoking.com.

"I hate smoking. It makes no sense," Taylor said. "You can't be a champion in anything if you have such a bad habit. I want people, especially kids, to understand that. If I can help one person quit or better yet *not start*, then it's worth it," he added. Jermain is the son of a former smoker. In fact, his mother stopped smoking after seeing him in an SOS television spot.

(More)

As part of a statewide kick-off, Arkansas' Gov. Mike Huckabee and Taylor launched the new SOS Web site earlier this year during a pep rally at Taylor's alma mater, McClellan Magnet High School in Little Rock, where they encouraged students to stay away from cigarettes.

"Arkansas has the third highest tobacco-related death rate in the nation. That's why I've made tobacco prevention and cessation a component of my Healthy Arkansas initiative," Huckabee said. Healthy Arkansas is a comprehensive effort to clearly define specific areas where behavioral changes can lead to healthier citizens. Tobacco use, obesity and physical inactivity are the program's primary components.

"While we are very encouraged to see the Arkansas youth smoking prevalence down from 35 percent in 2001 to 29.3 percent, it is so important that we continue to educate our young people on the dangers of tobacco use, as well as encourage adults to quit," explained Huckabee.

"Jermain has a strong following in Arkansas and believes in raising healthy kids. He's the perfect role model for the SOS campaign." Tobacco use is the nation's leading preventable cause of death, killing more than 400,000 people in the U.S. and costing the nation \$75 billion in smoking-caused health care bills every year.

Gov. Huckabee, elected today as chairman of the National Governors Association, is taking his Healthy Arkansas initiative nationwide under the banner of "Healthy America." The National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ranks Arkansas as one of only four states properly spending funds allocated to the state as part of the November 1998 Master Settlement Agreement with the tobacco industry.

Stamp Out Smoking is part of the Arkansas Department of Health's Tobacco Prevention and Education Program. To see more Jermain Taylor, visit stampoutsmoking.com.

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