

Tim Witherspoon Still Throwing

Written by Rick Folstad
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At 44, he still has that crazy overhand right. It comes in fast and mean and unless you've been waiting for it all night, it arrives unexpected; an unwelcome party crasher who suddenly turns out the lights. Tim Witherspoon is at the age when most men start taking longer naps, shorter walks and bigger helpings. They start thinking about grandchildren, hair plugs, light beer and comfortable shoes.

They don't start thinking about becoming heavyweight champion of the world.

Still, Witherspoon (55-11-1, 38 KOs) has that overhand right that won't go away, won't let him quit. It's there patiently waiting for another chance, another young career to ruin. If Witherspoon has lost anything over the years, it wasn't his ability to end fights early. Punching power is usually the last thing to abandon a fighter. If you can knock guys out when you're 24, you can knock them out when you're 44. Like George Foreman, Witherspoon has that gift. It's already carried him to two world championships.

Now he hopes he can ride it to a third.

He'll be packing that overhand right with him on Sunday when he takes on Lou Savarese (42-4, 34 KOs) at the Table Mountain Casino in Friant, CA., for the NABO heavyweight championship.

Billed as King of the Mountain, the fight will help decide who gets to move to the next square and who has to go back three spaces. The winner will earn some kind of heavyweight outskirts bragging rights, though it's hard to say exactly what those will be. While Witherspoon has that "not so secret" overhand right, Savarese isn't coming into this fight unarmed or unaware. A heavy-hitter himself, he's stunned his share of heavyweight hopefuls, though he was pretty much the stunnee against Mike Tyson. But so were a lot of good heavyweights.

Still, the legend in this fight belongs to Witherspoon. He's the one with the infamous punch, the second childhood and the two heavyweight titles.

"It would be idiotic to not be somewhat concerned about that punch," Savarese said recently. "Tim is still dangerous. You've just got to be smart about it."

As for what it feels like to be fighting an old man, Savarese, at 37, knows better than to consider Witherspoon anything less than a huge threat. Terrible Tim lands that one special punch and Savarese's career is suddenly

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pitched into the abyss.

“Age isn’t that much of a factor,” he said. “Look at Larry Holmes and George Foreman and what they did when they were older. Look at Lennox (Lewis) and Evander Holyfield. Those guys are all getting older, but they’re also taking better care of themselves.”

Like Witherspoon is doing.

What’s important to remember is that during his long career, Witherspoon was known to speed past the gym in order to arrive early at the party. Self-discipline has never been his strong suit. But at 44, he can’t get away with bad habits and still fight, and he knows it. His time left in the fight game is short and can be measured with a stopwatch. He can hear the seconds ticking away and that’s got to be the scariest thing of all.

Except for maybe that overhand right of his.