

David Tua: Born With What Can't Be Taught, Unable To Learn What Can

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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If I said to you, what are three of the most important physical traits needed in a heavyweight prospect? They'd have to be in no particular order, Punch, Chin, and Speed ! These are three things you can't teach, you're either born with it or your not. You can learn to improve your punching technique but, you can't become a puncher. Forget about improving speed and the ability to take a big shot, if it's not their at birth, you can't acquire it. However important speed may be, it's not quite as big a factor in the heavyweight division as it is in the lighter weight divisions. However history has not yet delivered the natural heavyweight who escaped getting caught with some devastatingly hard punches, so having a chin is paramount for a heavyweight.

Looking back over history, all of the top tier heavyweight champions possessed two of the three, and some of the all-time greats had all three. Going back no further then Joe Louis you can't help but notice other then Muhammad Ali, most of the respected and feared heavyweight champs carried the Big-Punch! Such as Dempsey, Louis, Marciano, Liston, Frazier, Foreman, Tyson and Lennox Lewis. Why do I bring this up ? Because currently their is an active heavyweight who possesses two of the three physical traits mentioned earlier. He has one-punch KO power in both hands, and he has a cast iron chin. I have yet to see him bothered by a single punch let alone hurt by one. His name is David Tua, and he's fighting Hasim Rahman on March 29th in what amounts to a title elimination bout. This is a rematch of their previous fight on 12/19/98 won by Tua via 10th round TKO.

When thinking of Tua, it's impossible not to think of the natural gifts he was born with. One punch power, and a great chin. These are things that heavyweights would give up ten years of their life to be blessed with. What a head start over most. Then why has the heavyweight with the biggest punch and best chin yet to capture a piece of one of the four heavyweight titles ?

A closer look at the Tua-man reveals possibly why he hasn't yet lived up to the potential and promise he showed coming off his 19 second knockout of former champ John Ruiz on 3/15/96. It's impossible not to notice that Tua has packed on 20 to 30 pounds since Ruiz. Apparently Tua bought in to the myth that added weight meant added power when in fact the opposite is true. The added weight Tua has gained has slowed him. The Tua who KO'd Ruiz had a pretty quick pair of hands which is not the case today. The added weight if it's done anything it's hindered him getting his punches off and maybe even some of the impact. Another factor keeping Tua from realizing his full potential is the fact that he's never learned how to use his short height and reach to his advantage like Joe Frazier did. In four of the more important fights in his career this has been painfully obvious. In his fights with Hasim Rahman and Fres Oquendo he was unable to get inside or cut off the ring . He moved forward following them around the ring with no head or upper body movement being a sitting duck for their jab but, he managed to land the big punch late in the fight to pull it out. His title fight with Lennox Lewis and title elimination bout with Chris Byrd also showed that he does not work the body in order to slow his opponents or corner them to set up his big shots to the head. Tua not being able to land the knockout punch in these fights led to him losing one sided decisions.

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David Tua is blessed to have one punch KO power and a concrete chin. These are huge for a heavyweight to possess especially in what would be considered a pedestrian heavyweight division at best. However, he cannot continue to keep looking for the one punch knockouts. He has to learn how to use his power to slow and trap the movers and boxers that he has shown to be vulnerable against. Once again I'll refer to Frazier, he was the ultimate catch and kill fighter. In all three historic fights with Muhammad Ali, Frazier had success cutting the ring in half and bobbing and weaving underneath and inside of Ali's jab. This enabled Frazier to work Ali's body which took his legs and slowed him down to where Ali was forced to fight flat-footed at times which was to Frazier's advantage. I don't believe Tua is as good an athlete, and doesn't have the inside hand speed as Frazier but, I don't see any Muhammad Ali in today's heavyweight ranks where he needs to be as good as Frazier.

Two fighters who Tua knocked out, John Ruiz and Hasim Rahman went on to win a piece of the heavyweight title after being defeated by Tua. For Tua to have any chance to win a piece of the title he must raise his game. He must stop following his opponents around the ring looking for one punch. He must start cutting off the ring taking away the escape routes of the boxers and movers. Tua must learn to bob and weave underneath and inside of the heavyweights who have been able to keep him outside with their long jab. Another thing Tua has to concentrate on is working the body, a lost art today. By working the body he'll accomplish two things, he'll be more in range to take advantage of his short reach, and the body punching will take away the legs and stamina from the fighters who have been able to out speed and maneuver him. Just as important as the before mentioned the Tua-man must get his weight down, at 5' 10" he has no business coming into the ring carrying 245-253 pounds. This adds nothing to his game, it only takes away from it.

In two weeks Tua fights a rematch with former champ Hasim Rahman. Rahman has been screaming for a rematch since their first fight. In that fight Rahman was caught with one of Tua's signature left hooks right after the bell ending round nine and was hurt badly. He didn't recover before the start of round ten and Tua knocked him out early in the tenth round. Up until that sweeping left hook, Tua hadn't won a round. He followed Rahman all over the ring looking for one big punch to end it, while Rahman was landing his left jab at will. All Rahman has to do in the rematch is fight the exact same fight he did last time, using his jab repeatedly while moving to his left away from Tua's hook. (Oh, and keep his hands up after the bell) For Tua to win this fight he has to change his attack plan as stated earlier. Maybe tying the Tua-man to a chair for about three or four hours a day making him watch Joe Frazier in all three of his fights with Ali for a start !

It's been seven years since Tua's destructive KO of Ruiz. Sitting ringside that night I felt certain that he would've won the title or at least a piece of it by now. Tua will be 30 very soon and short, swarming, pressure type heavyweights don't last as long as their bigger counterparts. They pay a price getting inside and by 32, their best days are behind them. Tua needs only to look back to Joe Frazier and Mike Tyson to see how they lost their effectiveness as they aged, time is running ...