

THE CRASH OF THE LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS 'a 100 year low'

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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This past Saturday night I watched the Antonio Tarver-Montell Griffin fight. The fight was for the vacant WBC/IBF light heavyweight titles vacated by Roy Jones. At the end of the fourth round I started thinking to myself, "Is this really for two thirds of the light heavyweight title? Can't be." All I kept thinking while watching this fight was, "Is this really the best the light heavies have to offer?" If this is the best of the best currently fighting at 175, then all I can say is this division has to be at it's lowest point since it's inception in 1903. It's that bad!

This fight was littered with many wild swinging punches and too many lulls in the action, with neither fighter displaying the caliber of fighting one would associate in a world championship fight.

How hard does any boxing fan who's followed the light heavies have to think to imagine what some of the past light heavyweight champions would have done to Tarver or Griffin? To be perfectly honest, it's scary. No wonder Roy Jones was so dominant at 175 (that's not taking anything from Jones). Antonio Tarver should count his blessing that Jones moved up to heavyweight, because he would've been humiliated had Jones remained and would never had been any more than a defeated title challenger. As far as Griffin, we saw what happened when he fought a focused Roy Jones: KO by 1.

While watching the fight I couldn't believe how one-dimensional both Tarver and Griffin were fighting. Neither fighter was trying to set anything up or trying to take away what the other wanted to do. What we saw for twelve rounds basically was Griffin trying to lure Tarver in, hoping he could land his looping left-hook or lunging right to the head, and Tarver pitter-patting with his jab, with his only intention in trying to land his straight left to Griffin's head. Why was Griffin, who is a short crouching fighter, moving away and keeping himself right at the end of Tarver's punches? Short crouching fighters have to shorten the distance when fighting taller fighters with a long reach. Griffin's only chance would be to move towards Tarver bobbing and weaving and going to the body, in hopes of bringing Tarver's hands down so he can go up to the head with the hook. The last thing he should do is go straight back, which is exactly what he did, and we saw what happened. He was reduced to looking for one big looping left-hook to pull the fight out. How can a fighter like Griffin who is a veteran of over 45 pro bouts, be so average against another fighter who is more or less just a one-two southpaw. Did Griffin really believe he had a chance to defeat Tarver by trying to counter-punch from the outside? HBO commentator Emanuel Stewart said from the outset that Griffin had to apply the pressure. Former light heavyweight champ Dwight Muhammad Qawi, (formerly Dwight Braxton) was about the same size as Griffin, I couldn't envision in a million years Tarver backing Qawi up rendering him helpless like he was able to do with Griffin.

And what about Tarver throwing that pitter-patter jab one at a time? Other than the eighth round, Tarver rarely threw more than one punch at a time, and never utilized the uppercut, a punch very effective against a shorter fighter. Here's a thought, try and picture Tarver setting up Saad Muhammad or Michael Spinks with an attack plan centered on that reaching/pawing right

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jab he was using--again, not in a million years. I'm sorry, I don't mean to offend anybody but the status of the light heavyweight division in the year 2003 is dreadful. Minus Roy Jones, there isn't one light heavyweight today who would've sniffed a title had he fought in any other era.

Over the years, I have said many times, how bad I think the light heavies are. Some have responded back, it's not so bad, it's just that Roy Jones is so good that he makes them look that way. I never bought that for a second. I'll admit, Jones is great and could've fought in any era, but any one of the past light heavyweight greats would have gone through this division as he did. It's one thing when they are fighting Roy Jones and getting thoroughly out classed but, when todays top light heavies face each other it more resembles a bout between two eight round prelim fighters then it does a world championship fight! Looking down the road, there's the potential to see some awful matches involving the light heavyweight elite. Can't wait to see Tarver's first title defense against the likes of Clinton Woods, Jorge Castro, or Paul Briggs. Almost makes a rematch between Tarver and Griffin look tolerable?

I think of a guy like Yaqui Lopez who never won a piece of the light heavyweight title, a fighter cursed by his birth certificate. Had Lopez been an active 175 pounder fighting in today's Roy Jones less light heavyweight division, he would be the fighter to beat. I have not a doubt that he would've taken Tarver apart. His legacy is never winning the title, despite four tries at it. Wonder if Tarver or Griffin or any of the other top light heavies would have been called champ, had they been forced to defeat John Conteh, Victor Galindez twice, or Matthew Saad Muhammad like Yaqui Lopez. The year 2003 is without question, the low point of the light heavyweight division in it's storied 100 years!

A thought on Jirov-Toney

Thank you Vassily and James, what a great fight. Thank you for showing up in top condition. Thank you for fighting like world champions. Can we please see it again with different judges? I won't let the horrendous scoring by the judges ruin the fight, the right guy won, but not 117-109, that is an insult to Jirov. I had the fight for Toney by two points, however it was very close but, Toney erased all doubt with his outstanding 12th round. Had Toney used his left-hook earlier, he may have won by stoppage. Jirov needs to develop his jab and a finishing punch to follow up his body punching to have a chance in a rematch. Thanks again for erasing my memory of Tarver-Griffin!