Written by Frank Lotierzo
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Larry Holmes vs. Lennox Lewis is an intriguing fight to ponder, "What IF?" They are the two most dominant heavyweight champs since Muhammad Ali's last title victory 25 years ago in 1978. Since Ali's last title win, Holmes and Lewis have competed in the most heavyweight title bouts. Only Joe Louis and Ali have won more career heavyweight title bouts than Holmes, and only Louis, Ali and Holmes have won more than Lennox Lewis. Along with being the two most dominant champs since Ali, Holmes and Lewis share some other career parallels. They both followed two of the most controversial champs in heavyweight history. Holmes lived in Muhammad Ali's shadow, and the presence of Mike Tyson loomed over Lewis. They both defeated the fighters who overshadowed them but, since both Ali and Tyson were past their peak when they finally did fight them, neither gets full credit for the win. However, this is less of an issue for Lewis since he's older than Tyson, so he does get credit for beating him in most boxing circles. Since Holmes was two months shy of being eight years younger than Ali, he doesn't receive the same credit as Lewis for beating his nemesis. Those who follow boxing know that its history is replete with these scenarios (Johnson beating Jeffries, and Marciano beating Louis come to mind).

Another thing that Larry and Lennox share is that they were both perceived to be beat able during their title tenure. Sometimes fans came away from their fights saying, "They won more because of what their opponents lacked than because of how great they fought." Also, neither Holmes nor Lewis captivated boxing fans by themselves. They needed to be matched with another name fighter to spark fan interest, unlike Ali and Tyson. Ali and Tyson could stir fan interest fighting guys like Richard Dunn and Julius Francis. Holmes needed an old Ali, Cooney, and Spinks to be a draw, and Lewis needed Holyfield, Tyson, and maybe Roy Jones down the road to bring out more than just boxing fans.

When comparing the fighting style of Holmes and Lewis, there are some similarities. Both had outstanding left jabs, however Holmes without question gets the nod here. It is my opinion that Holmes had possibly the greatest jab in heavyweight history, except for maybe the jab of Sonny Liston. Lewis has an outstanding jab, but it's not as good as Holmes' was. Lewis definitely has the harder right hand, and their left hook is about even, though neither was known for throwing the hook often. I would give Holmes the nod as far as uppercuts go, (and don't get carried away with the one Lewis rocked Klitschko with. Outside of Klitschko, his uppercut was a non-factor other than against Frank Bruno and, possibly, Michael Grant). Another trait shared by Holmes and Lewis is, both were capable of successfully adjusting to opponents with varying fighting styles. The difference is Lewis was the better two-handed puncher, and Holmes was the better boxer with faster hands and better mobility. As far as who took a better punch, this has to go to Holmes. Holmes was only stopped once, and that was by a prime 21 year old Mike Tyson, and that was when he was 38 and coming out of a two-year retirement. Lewis has been stopped twice. Once by Oliver McCall, who in his next fight was awarded a disputed decision over the 45-year-old Holmes, and by Hasim Rahman, who wouldn't have stopped Holmes even at 45. Lewis also appeared to be on shakier legs more than Holmes was, when nailed cleanly by an opponent during his title reign. When it comes to chin, there is no question; Holmes clearly took

the better punch!

When comparing two great champions, most will look at who fought and defeated the better caliber opposition. Like most things in boxing, this is very subjective. Looking at who Holmes fought outside of a shot Ali, Norton and Shavers are two of the better name fighters he beat. However, both Norton and Shavers were past their prime. The same can be said for Lewis, the two best name fighters he defeated were Holyfield and Tyson. And like Norton and Shavers, both Holyfield and Tyson were beyond their best. That being said, Lewis gets the nod here because the Holyfield and Tyson that Lewis beat were better and rank above the Norton and Shavers that Holmes beat. Going over the rest of their careers, it basically comes down to who you think were better between Berbick, Snipes, Cooney, Witherspoon, "Truth" Williams and Michael Spinks for Holmes, or Ruddock, Tucker, Mercer, McCall, Golota, Tua, Rahman, and Klitschko for Lewis? I'd say this is pretty close, but I would say Lewis has beaten the slightly better grade of fighter than Holmes has from top to bottom throughout the majority of their careers. Finally, I'd suggest that looking at Ray Mercer as a common opponent gives an indication as to the disparity between Holmes and Lewis. I realize that styles make fights, but an old Holmes dismantled Mercer with relative ease whereas Lewis in his prime had life and death with Ray.

Who Would Have Won

Again, this is very subjective and it's easy to build a case for whichever fighter of whom you were a bigger fan. Assuming both fought their absolute best the night they fought, picking the winner is a very close call. I like and respect both fighters, and consider them all-time greats. This is based on head-to-head facing other past greats and overall career accomplishment. However, I would pick prime Holmes to defeat prime Lewis, most likely by decision. I think Holmes is the better overall fighter and could present Lewis more problems than Lewis could present him. Holmes showed that he was more than capable of getting off the canvas to come back and win, while Lewis has never shown that he could. Seeing Holmes get up from the right hand that Earnie Shavers dropped him with in the seventh round of their title fight leads me to believe that it's a stretch to envision Lewis stopping Holmes. I doubt that Lewis could have hit Larry any harder, and most fail to mention that when Holmes got up from Shavers right hand, he actually started to win the round. On the other hand, I don't think it's out of the realm of possibility that Holmes was capable of stopping Lewis. The fact that Lewis was knocked out by McCall and Rahman with one punch shows me that he is vulnerable to be stopped by any great fighter he were to face. I also can't see Lewis winning a decision over Holmes. Holmes was clearly a better boxer than Lewis, with faster hands and better movement and balance. I also think Holmes was a little smarter fighter than Lewis, had better stamina and threw more punches. Even though the scenarios I just went through seem to tilt the scale very heavily in favor of Holmes, I don't count Lewis out and definitely feel he was capable of possibly beating Holmes. Although Lewis is just too good to count out, I just think Holmes was the better overall fighter and would've defeated Lewis had they met when both were at their best.

Writers Note

Yes, I know that Lewis isn't retired yet, however I've seen his peak and have no problem rating him based on his body of work up to this point. It's not like he's going to go on and win four or five more title fights before he retires or gets beat. If he does, I'll reevaluate my position. Since

Ali, I rate Holmes-1, Holyfield-2, Lewis-3, Tyson-4, and Bowe-5. If Bowe could have stayed on top longer and made more than two successful title defenses, he could've made it up to number two.