

Mike Tyson: Who Has He Beat ?

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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A couple nights past, I was having a conversation with someone who I hold in high regard when it comes to boxing insight. We were going back and forth between Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis, as to who fought the better fighters. One of the first questions thrown out was, "Who was the best fighter they beat?"

It's an interesting question and it does separate the fighters when you actually break down who their best wins are against. There are two ways to break this down: One, who was their signature win against and two, who was the best fighter they beat? When discussing the career of former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson, some (count me among them) question the caliber of the fighters that he's fought and defeated. Let's look at who are the best fighters he defeated.

When it comes to name recognition, there can be no disputing that Larry Holmes and Michael Spinks are the two best names Tyson has on his record in the win column. Holmes is the best name on his record as far as wins go. However, Holmes was 38 and hadn't fought in slightly over two years when he fought Tyson. Not to mention that Holmes was only a shell of what he was at his peak, and lost his last two fights to Michael Spinks before fighting Tyson. On the other hand, Tyson is not given enough credit for being the only fighter to stop Holmes. Yes, it was a shot Holmes, but no fighter ever stopped Holmes before, or after, Tyson. To me, Tyson's stoppage of Holmes is the biggest testament to his punching power.

Michael Spinks has to be considered Tyson's signature victory. The fact that he and Spinks were both undefeated, and both had a claim to the title made their fight one of the biggest fights of the 1980's. Some believe Tyson's first round knockout of Spinks was his best fight. However, Spinks was a blown up light heavyweight who caught Holmes at the end of his career and had the right style to trouble him. Anyone who followed boxing knew Spinks was all wrong for Tyson, and that it wasn't going to be a competitive fight (I know I knew it). Tyson-Spinks had Frazier-Foster written all over it. Spinks may have been the first light heavyweight champ to win the heavyweight title, but he's an all-time great light heavyweight champion and that's what he will always be remembered as. No doubt, 38-year-old Larry Holmes and 31-year-old light heavyweight Michael Spinks are the two best name fighters that Tyson has defeated.

If Holmes and Spinks are the two best names Tyson has beat, then who are the best and most formidable fighters that he's beat? In chronological order, it's between Pinklon Thomas, Tony Tucker and Razor Ruddock. When Tyson beat the once-beaten Thomas, he was coming off losing his WBC title to Trevor Berbick via a unanimous decision (though he had three nondescript wins in between). Thomas also was in and out of drug rehab a couple times after beating Tim Witherspoon for the title in 1984 and fighting Tyson in May of 1987. That being said, Thomas was still a pretty good fighter the night Tyson stopped him and Tyson did it impressively.

Tony Tucker was also a very good fighter when Tyson fought him in August of 1987. The

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undefeated Tucker faced Tyson in the final of the HBO heavyweight unification tournament. Tucker was coming off of a ten round stoppage over eventual Tyson conquer Buster Douglas en-route to capturing the IBF title in the HBO tournament. The 27-year-old Tucker was at his peak, and he managed to rock Tyson with a single right uppercut in the first round. This fight wasn't a typical Tyson cakewalk. Tyson was challenged a few times by Tucker during the fight, but he was never in trouble of losing it at any time. Tyson proved beyond a doubt that he was the better fighter on the way to winning a 12 round unanimous decision. This fight gave Tyson all three title belts that were up for grabs in the HBO tournament.

The 27-year-old Razor Ruddock was also one of the best heavyweights who Tyson defeated. The once-beaten Ruddock was on a roll going into the first Tyson fight. His only loss before fighting Tyson was being stopped in seven rounds by journeyman Dave Jaco in Ruddock's 11th fight as a pro. In the midst of his five fights before fighting Tyson, Ruddock scored impressive knockout wins over James Broad, Bonecrusher Smith and a shot Michael Dokes.

In the first Tyson-Ruddock fight, Ruddock lived up to his billing as a one-armed bandit. Tyson won the fight when Richard Steele jumped in and stopped the fight prematurely in the seventh round. Although the fight was stopped early, other than a brief Ruddock flurry in the sixth round in which he shook Tyson, the fight was never in doubt.

In the rematch three months later, Tyson won a unanimous decision over Ruddock. The second fight between Tyson and Ruddock was an entertaining fight with both fighters landing bombs. Tyson put Ruddock down in rounds two and round four, and broke his jaw in the fight. Though Ruddock never stopped trying to knock Tyson out throughout the fight, the difference was Tyson was too smart and complete of a fighter for Ruddock. Midway through the fight, Tyson had reduced Ruddock to just relying on his left hand smash (Ruddock's hybrid left hook-left uppercut punch). The smash was a devastating punch, but it was the only offensive weapon Ruddock had. Tyson, not having to worry about Ruddock's jab or right hand just basically lured him into throwing the smash, making him miss a majority of them and then countering him with two and three punch combinations.

The only other fighters that could possibly be added to this list are Frank Bruno and Carl "The Truth" Williams. The reason I don't include them is because they were both beaten soundly before facing Tyson. Bruno was knocked out for the count in 1984 by Bonecrusher Smith and by Tim Witherspoon in 1986, before fighting Tyson in 1989. Williams was dropped by James "Quick" Tillis in 1984, and dropped twice by Jesse Ferguson in 1985, two non punchers. "The Truth" was also dropped twice en-route to being stopped by Mike Weaver in two rounds in 1986, before fighting Tyson in 1989.

So, who is the best fighter that Tyson owns a win over? Is it Thomas, is it Tucker or is it Ruddock? I say it's between Tucker and Ruddock. I say this because Tucker and Ruddock were at their best when they lost to Tyson. Thomas went through drug rehab a few times and wasn't the same fighter that beat Tim Witherspoon for the title in August of 1984 when he fought Tyson in May of 1987.

So how do you break the tie between Tucker and Ruddock? Tucker was undefeated, and

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Ruddock only lost once before fighting Tyson. Tucker was the overall better fighter, but Ruddock was the better puncher. Tucker did win a piece of the title, while Ruddock never fought for the title. Tucker went the distance with Lennox Lewis in a title bout in 1993, and Ruddock was stopped in two rounds by Lewis in a title elimination bout in 1992. Until facing Mike Tyson, Tucker was unbeaten in 37 fights. Until facing Dave Jaco, Ruddock was unbeaten in 10 fights. Tucker stopped Dave Jaco in three rounds in October of 1985. Ruddock was stopped in seven rounds by Dave Jaco in April of 1985. Hmmm, I say Tony Tucker.

Summing up the best of Tyson's career goes like this. Larry Holmes is the best name fighter he has beaten. Michael Spinks is his signature win, and Tony Tucker is the best fighter that he ever beat in his career. When People think of Tyson, they think of some of the great fighters he's been in the ring with like Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis, but he was beaten soundly by both. Tony Tucker is the best fighter Mike Tyson has ever defeated.

This is why in my opinion that Tyson doesn't measure up to the greatest of the greats. You can talk about his power and hand speed all you want, but the bottom line is Tony Tucker is the best it ever carried him past. If wins over Tucker and Ruddock qualify Tyson as one of the greatest of the greats, than Jerry Quarry has just as much a claim to greatness as Tyson. Quarry's best wins are over Lyle and Shavers. Lyle and Shavers were both more formidable fighters than Tucker and Ruddock. If you believe Tucker and Ruddock were better than Lyle and Shavers, you either don't know what you're watching or, you're a relative of Tyson. Quarry is remembered for losing to the best of his era in Ali and Frazier, just like Tyson's remembered for losing to Holyfield and Lewis, the best of his era. In boxing, it's not how many you beat, but it's who you beat. For Tyson, it's Tucker and Ruddock?

Writers Note

I thought to be considered a great you had to "WIN" against the best fighters you fought, not lose to them or put up a half decent fight. Holyfield and Lewis are the two best fighters Tyson has ever shared a ring with. He is 0-3 in those bouts and was knocked out by both. Tyson is more known for his losses than his wins, what other all-time great heavyweight champ can that be said about? Absolutely none. He looks awesome on the heavy bag and the pads, but not so great when he has a top fighter in front of him. Don't take my word, just look at his record. All his power and speed meant zilch when he was in with the best of his era. That's a fact not an opinion.