

Jones May Need Another Heavy Win

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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On March 1 of this year, undisputed light heavyweight champ Roy Jones won me over with his one-sided victory over WBA heavyweight champ John Ruiz. Over the years, I've been one of Jones' toughest critics, probably the staunchest of the few that existed. However, the way he took apart Ruiz was enough for me to see that I underrated him. Though Ruiz was hand picked and had nothing to beat Jones with, I didn't think Jones would completely control him for the duration of the fight (yes, I did pick Jones to win).

What stumped me with Jones was that I've always been more impressed with fighters who won close fights against great opposition, than with those who dominated second and third tier opposition. I'm from the school of thought that believes who you beat is more a testament to greatness than how many you beat. Whenever I watched Jones fight, I thought to myself, "What would Michael Spinks or Dwight Muhammad Qawi have done to those same light heavyweights?" Every time, I came away thinking they would've won just as impressively, just maybe not as flashy.

I still believe Jones has gone through the worst era in the 100 year history of the light heavyweight division. To anyone who doubts this, I suggest you go back and research some of the past light heavyweight generations. The Roy Jones era makes Bob Foster's era look like murders row. What further convinces me of this is how ordinary some of the other contenders look against each other. It's not just that Jones is so good and made them look bad, though I'll concede it is a factor.

The fact is, the light heavyweight division has been in the doldrums since the '80s. Look at the Tarver-Griffin title fight; tell me you can picture either of them surviving Foster, Spinks, Galindez or Qwai? And a quick review of Jones' record indicates that he beat Hopkins at middleweight and Toney at super-middleweight. His list of light heavyweight challengers is very thin, but he did what great fighters do, beat the fighters who were put in front of him. And he did it with relative ease.

Jones has backed me into a corner where I am hard pressed to come up with 10 past light heavyweight champions who I would pick to beat him. Yes, Jones is an all-time great at light heavyweight, although I have no doubt that still isn't high enough praise for some, but it is for me. That being said, I'm still more impressed with Spinks beating an old Larry Holmes and think it's more significant than Jones beating any version of John Ruiz.

Now that I've come around on Jones, what if Ruiz gets killed in his next fight (if he fights again). Or, what if Jones never fights at heavyweight again. The way it looks now, Jones is going to fight Antonio Tarver in his next fight. Tarver has as much chance of beating Jones, as Jones does of starting at point guard for the San Antonio Spurs! There is no need to get into the X's and O's for a Jones-Tarver match-up. Jones is a great fighter and Tarver is a good fighter. Jones wins going away!

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Jones May Need Another Win vs. a Top Heavy

Here's where it gets tricky for Roy. What if he never fights at heavyweight again and Ruiz gets demolished by one of the top ranked heavyweights in his next fight? I can hear it now, "See, I told ya Ruiz was a bum. Look what a good heavyweight did to him. He's nothing but a journeyman and that's why Jones picked him. He made his name off of being competitive with a shot Holyfield." Does any fight fan have the slightest doubt that will be echoed by those who still question how good Jones is? Obviously if Ruiz scores an impressive win over one of the top ten heavyweights, Jones' stock will soar even higher.

Lets say Ruiz does get beat convincingly by one of the upper tier heavyweights. Will that water down Jones' victory over Ruiz? Although the question would be a legitimate one, here's, why it shouldn't hold water. Look, nobody thought Ruiz was a great heavyweight when Jones fought him. In fact, Jones was almost a 2-1 favorite in the fight. However, Ruiz was still one of the ten best heavyweights fighting at the worst when Jones beat him. The fact is Jones went from light heavyweight and fought a legitimate top ten heavyweight and won 35 minutes of a 36-minute fight. In my book, there is a lot to be said for that.

If there is one thing that we know about boxing, it's that you're only as good as your last fight, or sometimes your opponent's last fight. That is why if Ruiz gets tuned up if he fights again, Jones will almost have to fight and beat one of the perceived top heavyweights in the world. It may not be fair, but that's just the way it is. A Ruiz loss will put pressure on Jones. There will be a faction out there that will insist that Ruiz was a handpicked stiff and Jones proved nothing in beating him. It's an overstatement, but it's not totally without merit.

Jones shut me up and proved to me he is worthy of the praise as an all-time great. However, I have plenty of friends and colleagues who accuse me of going soft on him. They say I can't believe you're swayed by his win over a stiff like Ruiz. So obviously there is still a faction that exists, who still question him. I don't think I was fooled. That's why Jones has to go out and beat one of the top heavyweights in the world. A win over one of the top active heavyweights will shut everybody up for good, but it has to be over one of the two or three best out there!