

Don't Over React To Mesi's Early Knockout

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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In his last fight, heavyweight Joe Mesi scored a first round knockout over DaVarryl Williamson. This was supposed to be an indicator fight for Mesi. Viewers were looking at this fight as a somewhat test for Mesi, who has attracted much attention recently. And yes Mesi has attracted much attention due to his ability and his skin pigmentation. Let's not kid ourselves!

Heading into his fight with Williamson, Mesi had been criticized for fighting soft opposition. However, this is something all fighters do on the way up, and rightly so, fight handpicked opponents. In his fight with Williamson we were supposed to get some answers on whether or not Mesi is for real. The only thing we knew for sure about Mesi before fighting Williamson was that he could hit with both hands.

And guess what? That is still basically all that we know about him. The Mesi-Williamson fight brought two things to light that we can be absolutely sure of. One, Mesi is not as great or devastating as he looked in knocking Williamson out. Two, Williamson is not as bad or awful as he looked in being knocked out in the first round. Those two things are the only certainties we can take from the fight between Joe Mesi and DaVarryl Williamson!

First round knockouts are the worst scenario on which to judge an up and coming prospect. Let's give Mesi high props for winning the best way possible, knocking an opponent out in the first round. However, does anyone who knows anything about boxing really believe that Mesi is going to knockout every one of his future opponents in the first round? Hell No! If Mesi were to go on to knockout every future opponent in the first round, he'd be regarded as the greatest heavyweight fighter of all-time. I guarantee you Mesi will not retire as the greatest heavyweight in boxing history. I guarantee it!

When prospects, especially heavyweights, score many early round knockouts on the way up to the title, many over react to the hype and excitement. Granted, everyone loves knockouts, it's the most definitive way to end a fight and achieve victory. But, no fighter knocks out all of his foes, especially early. Most get so swept up in the excitement of the early round knockout that they forget we really know nothing else about the fighter other than he can hit. In boxing, it's not always the best puncher who wins, or goes on to gain Hall-Of-Fame status and greatness. If power was the final judgement of a fighter, than Pep, Robinson, Ali, and Leonard would be no more than just names in the annals of boxing history.

When a fighter scores an early round KO on his way to the title, what do we really know about him and his make up as a fighter, other than he can hit? Not too much. Remember, unless you believe Mesi is going to score all early round knockouts for the remainder of his career, none of the following matters.

As it stands right now, we have no clue if Mesi has a solid enough chin to be a future champion or star in the division. We have no idea if he cuts easy, nor do we know if his defense is good enough to make a good boxer miss him. Can he make a good fighter miss with his jab? Or is he

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Daivd Tua, who the only way he doesn't get hit with a jab is if his opponent doesn't throw it.

What kind of stamina does Mesi have? Have we seen anything to indicate that he could keep a pace like Holyfield and Bowe did in their first fight, without needing an air tank on his back? Maybe he can, but until he has been asked to do so in the ring, we just don't know! And he will be asked to do so somewhere down the road.

Is there a particular style that he is vulnerable too? Does he carry his punch throughout the fight? Is he strictly a front runner? Does he have the character to get up off the canvas and come back to win? How will he hold up versus a fighter who can take his punch and keeps coming after him?

I'm sure I've left out other scenarios that most fighters have had to confront on their way to the title and as a defending champ. The point is that until a fighter is confronted with those scenarios, no one knows how he'll hold up . And regardless how great a fighter goes on to become, he more than likely had to answer those questions more than once.

Looking back at heavyweight history, many fighters have taken the division by storm like Mesi has in his last two fights. And in many cases even more impressively. Who was more devastating than George Foreman and Mike Tyson coming up? Look what we found out about them. Foreman's stamina betrayed him when he was extended deep into a fight. Tyson came apart mentally when he was met with stern resistance. And Foreman and Tyson are two of the best punchers to come through the heavyweight division since Sonny Liston 40 years ago, and they certainly didn't knockout all of their opponents. Did they?

How about Earnie Shavers, he was the master of the early round knockout. His right hand may have been harder than any one-punch in Foreman or Tyson's arsenal. Yet he didn't have a great chin, and his stamina was usually lacking as well. Outside of eight seconds in his rematch with Holmes, he never even won a piece of the title.

Looking at the two fighters Mesi is most often compared to, Cooney and Morrison, is he as impressive coming up as either of them were? In my opinion, Cooney and Morrison hit harder than Mesi. The left-hook of both Cooney and Morrison is harder than any single punch Mesi throws. However, I think Mesi is a better boxer than they were and has better foot movement. As impressive as Cooney and Morrison were coming up, and they did look awesome in some fights, we eventually learned what their vulnerabilities were. It's only a matter of time until we find out what Mesi's are.

Regarding Cooney, we found out that he was a head case. And he never recovered psychologically after losing to Holmes. The one fallacy about Cooney is that he lacked heart. Cooney was held back by his management team of Mike Jones and Dennis Rappaport. Cooney wanted to fight the top fighters, however his mangers were more concerned with protecting him and building him up as a White-Hope so they could cash in against Holmes. And they did.

Morrison, who could really hit, was managed brilliantly by Bill Cayton. Morrison did not have the greatest chin, and it cost him in his biggest fights against the best opponents he fought.

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However, he did have heart. Any fighter to comeback and seemingly unfazed after the devastating knockout he suffered versus Ray Mercer, gets my respect. Eventually Morrison was done in by his wild personal life outside the ring leaving boxing after contracting the HIV Virus. His biggest accomplishments were winning the WBO title and decisioning a poorly prepared George Foreman in 1993.

Throughout the history of the heavyweight division, many fighters have arrived on the scene like a Hurricane. And everyone of those fighters was tested somewhere during their ascend to the title, or as champion. Some of them went on to be great heavyweights, and some of them never won the title. I'll bet in most cases, the morning after their most impressive early round knockout, they were being talked about as being unbeatable. Which was never realized.

Where does that leave Mesi? Who knows, it's too early to project how good he'll be or how far he will go. I can only go by what I know and have seen. That is he has power and charisma, and scored an impressive knockout over DaVarryl Williamson in his last fight. I also know I won't get carried away by it, because it won't continue to be nearly as easy as his level of competition gets better as he moves up the heavyweight ladder.

Overall, I think Mesi is pretty good and has a bright future. Will he be a fighter we'll be talking about in 20 years? I don't think so, but who knows. Can he win the title after Lewis is gone? I'd say the odds are in his favor, but I wouldn't bet my life on it. Given that the heavyweight division is weak and in a state of transition, his chances are as good as the next guys.

Lastly, look at the difference in Mesi and Guinn coming off their last fight. In Guinn we know that he has a helluva chin. He can box and remain poised under pressure. Guinn showed great stamina and mixed his punches up well along with having good hand speed. Guinn also seems to be a fighter that can adapt to different styles, and he can punch. Can we say any of that about Mesi, other than he can punch? And that's not a shot a Joe Mesi, not in the least. No way will I denigrate him for scoring a first round knockout. I'm sure if Guinn could've gotten a first round knockout, he would take it. What I am saying is that there are less questions about Guinn than there are Mesi. Which doesn't mean he is or will be a better fighter than Mesi. That's the problem with early round knockouts, they leave many questions unanswered.

There are four things I know for sure that I'm right about. One, Mesi is good and has the potential to be really good. Two, he's not as good as he looked stopping Williamson! Three, Williamson is not a bum or as bad as he looked being stopped by Mesi! Four, don't judge the winner or the loser off of an early round knockout, it's really not a true indicator.