Written by Frank Lotierzo
Saturday, 04 October 2003 18:00

If you're anything close to being a serious boxing fan, you have to have a lump in your throat about now. I know that I do. It never fails in boxing, all the character traits that spur fighters on to achieve greatness, always comes back to get them in the end. Heart, courage, toughness, desire, and the refusal to accept defeat, are just some of the character traits that enable fighters to go onto greatness. Evander Holyfield at his best owned all of them and then some.

In what surely has to be his last fight as a major player in the heavyweight division, Evander Holyfield was stopped by James Toney in the 9th round of their 12 round fight at the Mirage in Las Vegas. It was obvious that Holyfield was just an empty package against Toney right from the start. He had absolutely nothing. Holyfield exhibited everything that a shot fighter exhibits at the end of their career. He had no defense, no reflexes or reaction. His speed was gone, he had no punch, and no stamina.

The fight with Toney cannot be brushed aside by Holyfield as being against an opponent who refused to fight with him, or who had a tough style to fight. Holyfield was not injured prior to or during the fight. He was in the best possible shape he could've been in. The fact of the matter is Evander Holyfield is a shot fighter. At this stage of his career, being two weeks shy of turning 41, I doubt he could defeat any legitimate top ten heavyweight in the world.

In reality, Evander Holyfield hasn't been close to being a great fighter since November of 1997, six long years ago, when he stopped Michael Moorer in defense of his heavyweight title. Since stopping Moorer, Holyfield hasn't been anything special, let alone great. In his rematch with Lennox Lewis in late 1999, he had flashes of brilliance, but that's about it.

This fight with Toney was different. He was really beaten up and had nothing to answer Toney with. I don't even think it was because Toney was so great in the fight, it was more Holyfield not having anything left. Look, Toney fought a good fight, and he showed that he may be a player at heavyweight, but it was more Holyfield having nothing left, than it was Toney being so terrific.

The reason I believe this is because Toney stood basically right there in front of Holyfield. By the time it took Holyfield to get set and let is his hands go, Toney unloaded two and three punch combinations to disrupt him. Toney was the perfect opponent for Holyfield to get back on the winning track against, the problem was Holyfield is completely eroded as a fighter. There were many times during the fight that Toney stood flat-footed right in front of Holyfield without even punching, and Holyfield still couldn't get set, let alone get his punches off.

After the first round, it was painfully clear that Holyfield had to think of what he wanted to do, or should be doing. Nothing Holyfield did or tried against Toney was instinctive like it used to be. Evander resorted to everything against Toney. He tried crowding him and using his strength and that had no effect. Because of his shot reflexes he missed a stationary Toney. He tried backing away and drawing Toney to him. This didn't work because Toney beat him to the punch. If this doesn't convey to Holyfield that it's over, then somebody better save him from himself!

Watching this fight I was torn, I love and respect Holyfield, but I know that there is absolutely no chance of him ever winning the heavyweight title again, it's over. What really hurt me was seeing Toney mock him during the fight. Who would've ever thought that Toney would be able to control Holyfield so easily in a fight, that he could mock him and jaw with the judges at the same time? That's how far Holyfield has slipped.

Hopefully Holyfield will never fight again. There is absolutely no reason for him to. He has had a brilliant Hall-Of-Fame career, and he will certainly go down as an all-time great. In my book he's one of the ten best heavyweight champions in history, regardless of whatever criteria that you chose to rank them.

The fight with Toney will forever be remembered to Holyfield's career as Marciano is to Louis' and Holmes is to Ali's. And that is it was the night that convinced all without any shadow of doubt that they are retired as fighters. Regardless if he ever steps in the ring again with gloves on. As great a champion as Holyfield was, he to has to succumb to the two opponents who whip all athletes and fighters. Mother nature, and Father time. Thanks for the fun and memories Evander. It will be sometime before the boxing world is blessed with another fighter like you!