

## Joe Mesi: Questions And Concerns

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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A few months back after heavyweight Joe Mesi stopped DaVarryl Williamson in the first round, I wrote a column titled "Don't Overreact To Mesi's Early Knockout." The purpose of the article was to try and quell some of the overreaction and analization of Mesi based off of a one round knockout.

As I've said before, first round knockouts are the worst scenario in which to accurately judge and evaluate any fighter. Most of the time it amounts to one fighter being psyched up and ready who comes out and jumps on his opponent. The fighter who is stopped is usually not warmed up and ready for the onslaught. Remember, fighters who can punch are always going to blow through second tier opposition.

This past week, Joe Mesi stepped up in his level of competition and fought fringe contender Monte Barrett. The fight with Barrett was the perfect fit for Mesi at this stage of his career. Since this was Mesi's first fight under his three fight deal with HBO, you know for certain that Barrett was deemed safe by the suits at HBO and the Mesi brain trust.

Barrett had name recognition, and sometimes didn't fight with passion in the big spot. On top of that he had some boxing ability which would help give Mesi some needed rounds, and he had shown a decent chin since he was only stopped once in his career by Wladimir Klitschko. And of course the main thing Barrett exhibited throughout his career is that he didn't posses the big punch. Going into this fight, Barrett appeared to be the ideal fighter to give Mesi some rounds. However, Mesi's team probably felt that Joe could still probably beat him in a spectacular fashion. Well in boxing, things don't always go as planned. Some seem to forget that the other guy is getting paid too.

Much to the surprise of many, and yes it was a surprise because many felt Mesi would stop Barrett, included myself, the fight went the distance. Not only did the fight go the distance, but Barrett had some very good moments in the fight. Some may have not liked the decision, but since boxing is scored by the round, I didn't have any problem with it. The fight was not difficult to score, I had it 6-4 Mesi.

Yes, I thought Mesi won it, but it was close and Barrett fought well down the stretch. However, there were some things about Mesi that I observed that I find a little troubling. It appeared that once Barrett endured the early onslaught, and started to fight back, Mesi was a different fighter. Mesi seemed to have things going pretty much his way until he was dropped by Barrett. Once Mesi got up from a solid left-hook from Barrett, he was not the same fighter.

In the fight, Barrett was dropped before Mesi, yet he seemed to handle it better? Maybe it was because Barrett had been down before, and he drew off that. What stood out to me was that Barrett's confidence wasn't shook after he was down, and Mesi's was. Barrett got up after being down and took the fight to Mesi. Once Barrett started pushing the fight, it appeared that Mesi submitted mentally and let Barrett lead? That is very troubling to me. I didn't see Mesi fight with

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the so-called warrior mentality that many undefeated fighters claim to have. This type of mind set has troubled me with other fighters as well in the past.

That is one of the problems I had with Mike Tyson. I've always felt that he lost much of his confidence once he was met with serious resistance. Back to Mesi. Another thing that bothered me about Mesi was that he didn't carry his punch late into the fight, and he stopped committing to them. There is only one reason why a fighter fails to totally commit to his punches. This is because he knows that when he does, he's in a position to get nailed back in return. Maybe it's just me, but I got the feeling that Mesi was worried about getting hit after he was down?

One other thing bothered me about Joe. When he came out for the last round, he had to have known that Barrett had closed the gap and was controlling the fight based off of the 7th, 8th, and 9th rounds. I would think the last thing Mesi wanted was to let Barrett finish strong in the final round and sway the crowd? Yet Joe came out and just basically fought to make it through the 10th round. I didn't see the urgency in him that I was expecting. Obviously he was tired, but I thought we'd see a more furious rally by Mesi to try and turn the fight and finish leaving the crowd with the impression he was winning at the end.

Based off of Mesi's last fight with Monte Barrett, I have three area's of concern. How will he hold up under fierce resistance from a top contender? Will his stamina improve enabling him the capacity to fight a complete fight from round one thru twelve. And last, does he carry his punch late in the fight.

Again, I will not bury him as being a media creation who has been brilliantly managed. And I will not praise him to the enth degree declaring him as a future heavyweight champion. I don't know because the jury is still out. Like with all up and coming fighters, the burden of proof is on him. And there are still some questions that must be answered.