

The Gunslinger versus the Boogeyman.

Written by Rick Folstad
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If there's a bad guy in this big-time showdown, it's James "Lights Out" Toney, the jokester with the quick mouth and the even quicker hands.

Toney is the guy you see in your worse nightmares, the boogeyman with the Cheshire Cat grin and the Freddie Kruger demeanor. He slips into your dream just about the time you're ready to ask your sweetheart to marry you, and then he kicks sand in your face, calls you a momma's boy and steals your girl.

He slaps you across the back of the head and asks you're going to do about it, and all you can do is wish you had a 34-inch Sammy Sosa autographed baseball bat in your hands and a quick way out of town.

But the chatter and the chastising are part of the Toney arsenal, a big piece of what he brings into the ring with him. Like a devastating hook or a numbing jab, it's all part of the total package, part of the fight plan, another way to beat a man down. What you see is what you get. What you hear, you don't want to listen to.

If you don't like to be beaten and ridiculed, don't go near a boxing ring with Toney standing in it.

Saturday night at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, Toney will fight four-time heavyweight champ Evander "Real Deal" Holyfield in a 12-round, non-title heavyweight fight on pay-per-view. It's the kind of fight where anything can happen, which means it has a lot in common with most prize fights.

But this one is different, if only because Holyfield has always been at the top of his game, and Toney just recently returned to his.

Four years ago, this fight never would have been made. Toney was still ordering seconds and thirds for dinner and Holyfield was still one of the most dangerous heavyweights in the world.

But now it's one of the more intriguing fights of the year because somewhere along the way, Toney remembered what it was like years ago when he was at his very best. He remembered what it was like to be one the very best and he decided to get that feeling back.

As for Holyfield, you can't help but believe that he's looking at this fight as just being another long night at the office, another big mouth that needs closing, a brash fool making bold promises he can't keep.

Holyfield is like the old gunfighter who has to keep proving he's still one of the fastest guns around. The new top guns keep calling him out and he keeps showing up on main street at noon with the sun at his back, looking for any kind of advantage that will give him an edge.

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Unfortunately, the old cowboy has been taking a few bullets recently. Toney knows it and that's why he wants this fight now, and wouldn't have taken it four years ago.

In his last seven fights dating back to his first loss to Lennox Lewis in March, 1999, Holyfield is 2-3-2. His wins were over Hasim Rahman and John Ruiz. His losses were to Ruiz, Lewis and Chris Byrd.

You can't help but believe that at 40, Holyfield wishes he was the same fighter he was at 30.

You know that at 35, Toney is glad he's not the same fighter he was at 32.