Written by Frank Lotierzo
Friday, 05 March 2004 18:00

He stood just over 6'1", and weighed in between 209 and 213 pounds in is prime. His fights were hard to score and none of the world's top heavyweight's wanted to face him unless it meant a title shot. Sometimes he would make weird and goofy faces at his opponents during the fight. Defense was his forte, and he couldn't punch. He was pretty quick, but he was more sneaky than fast. He fought very loose and relaxed, and was more cunning than fundamentally sound. His name isn't Chris Byrd and he wasn't a southpaw. His name was Jimmy Young and his best years were 1974-77. Of all the top heavyweights currently ranked in Ring Magazine's top ten, Young is often compared to IBF champ Chris Byrd. Like Byrd, Young wasn't a big or powerful heavyweight. Unlike Byrd, Young didn't fight in the so-called era of the Super-Heavyweight, too bad for Young.

The point is Byrd, despite being a relatively small heavyweight has only been taken apart and stopped once. Young, like Byrd fought some monster heavyweights as well. Young shared the ring with big men who could really punch like Shavers twice, (don't give me Shavers only weighed 210-213, the fact is he could punch as good or better than any of today's big heavies) Lyle twice, Foreman, and Norton. Shavers was the only one of those fighters to drop Young, and was also the only one to stop him. But in all fairness to Young, when he fought Shavers he was a veteran of only 11 fights compared to Shavers who had 44 fights and was 42-2. A year and a half after being stopped by Shavers in the first round, Young fought him to a 10 round draw in a fight many thought Young deserved the nod.

Over the last few years, it has been a hotly contested debate about the bigger heavyweights fighting today and if they would have a significant advantage over those of past era's? In my opinion there is no absolute answer, there are pro's an con's on both sides. Just to set the record straight on my behalf, I think the size factor of today's heavyweights is way overblown. I think the top heavyweight's from the 60's, 70's, and 80's could have held more than their own versus the heavyweight's of the 90's & 2000's. Remember, I said the top heavyweights, not the journeymen. Today's heavyweights have a supposed advantage in weight and presumably strength. The heavyweights of the past 40 or so years were a little quicker, and in my opinion were better fighters. I also think that they were in better condition, despite the so-called advances in training and nutrition.

In the mid 1970's Jimmy Young was ranked as high as number three in the world. He was a legitimate top ten heavy from 1975-77. I think Young, like Chris Byrd could've held his own with a majority of today's top ten contenders. Below I've matched Young with some of today's top ranked heavyweights. Outside of a few of today's best heavyweight fighters, I don't think Young would've been beaten decisively. Remember, Young was the victim of some bad management decisions early in his career. Most of his defeats came early in his career and after 1978. Even in those defeats he took many top young prospects the distance. Only Gerry Cooney in 1980, when Young was 32 did he get beat up. And that was mainly due to a terrible cut over his eye that hindered his vision while Cooney teed off on him. Cooney's left-hook was every bit as devastating as any punch in the arsenal of anyone of today's top heavyweights, and Young

didn't go down nor was he staggered or shook.

Young vs Byrd

What an eye sore this would have been to watch. The fighter who assumes the role of the aggressor would've been the one who was at the style disadvantage. We saw when Byrd fought Oquendo, he wasn't at his best when he attacked and pushed the fight. And Young was also a fish out of water when he had to be the aggressor. No doubt that Young-Byrd would've gone the distance. In this fight I could see either fighter winning. I would make the best Young a slight favorite over the best Byrd. I think Young would've drawn Byrd to him and been able to counter him. I also think Young beat better fighters. Basically, he beat Ali and was screwed out of the decision, though it was an eroded and terribly out of shape Ali. Young holds two solid wins over Lyle, beat the once beaten Foreman. And in my opinion was shafted in a title elimination bout versus Norton losing a split decision. Byrd's best wins are over Vitali Klitschko by stoppage, though he was losing when the fight was halted. He beat Tua, and a shot Holyfield. However, Byrd does have great credentials.

Young vs Sanders

I'm sure many think this would be automatic for Sanders. The main reason for that is Sanders upset stoppage win over Wladimir Klitschko. The fact is Sanders was being called a bum, and Klitschko was being ridiculed for fighting him before their fight. Many were highlighting that Sanders ran out of gas and was stopped by Rahman, and was beaten by Nate Tubbs. Young could've definitely survived with Sanders. At 224 Sanders isn't a giant and isn't that great of a puncher that Young would've been blown out. Sanders also isn't a fighter who fights bell to bell and throws non stop punches. Young fought bigger punchers than Corrie, and better boxers than him. This won't be popular, but I could definitely see Young at his best frustrating Sanders and winning a stinker.

Young vs Vitali Klitschko

This is a very tough fight to imagine Young winning. Vitali is too tall and has too much reach for Jimmy. Klitschko wouldn't have to fall prey to Young's tricks and traps in order to hit him. He could outscore him with his jab from outside. Young doesn't have the strength or punch to keep Vitali off. Klitschko is just too much for Young. Although Young is skilled, he just isn't good enough to overcome his physical deficiencies to beat Vitali. I see Vitali stopping Young in the mid rounds, but not putting him down. Young stayed up versus too many good punchers to go down. Even a faded Young remained up right versus a close to prime Cooney, whose hook was harder than any punch in Vitali's arsenal.

Young vs Tua

I think this fight would've resembled Tua's fight against Byrd. Tua is so one dimensional, I can't see Young getting cornered and banged out by him. Rahman, Lewis, and Byrd proved beyond all doubt that if you move and jab, Tua has no clue how to get close enough to do damage. On top of that, Tua constantly looks to get his opponent out with one punch. Young would've had

no shot versus Tyson because Tyson threw more punches and was better than Tua at cutting the distance and getting inside. But Tua's is a different story. I can easily see Young tying up Tua and frustrating him. Again, Young had an outstanding chin, and stood up to Lyle, Foreman, Norton and Cooney when he was at or close to his peak. I don't think Tua throws enough punches to get Young out. Young decisions Tua.

Young vs Rahman

In this hypothetical match up, I see Young winning by a comfortable margin. Rahman is not an outstanding boxer or puncher. He is not a busy fighter who overwhelms his opponents with non-stop punching. Rahman is a basic one-two fighter. He looks to get his opponents out with one big right. Rahman also goes through patches during his fights where he stops fighting and does nothing. Hasim is just not busy enough to out work or hustle Young. After seeing Ruiz out-box Rahman, I see Young easily outscoring him and frustrating him. The only shot Rahman has is to catch lighting in a bottle like he did in the first Lewis fight. I don't see that happening. Young takes Rahman to boxing school and wins a one sided decision.

Young vs Wladimir Klitschko

Like with Vitali, I see Wladimir a tough match up for Young. Wladimir is a faster and better boxer than Vitali. Wlad's reach and jab would cause Young fits. Wladimir could out-box him from ring center without worrying about being countered. Even if Wladimir's chin is his biggest liability as a fighter, it wouldn't be a problem versus Young. Jimmy just doesn't have the strength to out box or punch Wladimir. Klitschko would dictate the pace of this fight and would also outwork Young. I see Jimmy having his hands full in this potential match up. Wlad beats Young convincingly like he beat Byrd.

Young vs Oquendo

This is another match up that I think favors Young. Fres is not real fast, and can be out boxed. Young would lure Fres to sleep and then open up with three or four punch combinations beating him to the punch. Fres would no doubt try and press Young and impose his will on him. Those are the type fighters that Young usually had his way with. One way Fres could've made it interesting would be to try and draw Young to him like he did Byrd. This is a strategy that Young would've been vulnerable too. However, I think Fres would most likely try and out muscle Jimmy and bang him around. Jimmy's too quick and cute for Oquendo. I don't see Fres stopping Young or wearing him down. Young wins a clear cut decision over Oquendo.

Lennox Lewis is not included among the top fighters I matched Young against because of his recent retirement. Obviously, Lewis is a bad match up and would've been a significant favorite over Young. I also didn't include **James Toney** or **Roy Jones** because they are smaller heavyweights who moved up from middleweight. Both Toney and Jones are smaller and quicker fighters, the type that would give Young trouble. I used Byrd only because his style is sometimes compared to Young's. The point is not that Jimmy Young was a great fighter, because he wasn't. He was a good boxer who fought out of a defensive posture. He wasn't big and he couldn't punch. However, he was skilled and when he was in shape he was a very hard

guy to fight. If Young was around today, he wouldn't be champ, but he easily could've been a top ranked contender despite his lack of power and size.

In my opinion, Jimmy Young could've easily held his own in today's heavyweight division. Although Young retired with a lot of loses on his record, an overwhelming majority of those came at a point in his career where he was out of shape and well past his peak. Some of those loses were to highly touted prospects 14-0 Michael Dokes, 18-0 Greg Page, 15-0 Tony Tubbs, and 25-0 Tony Tucker. All four of those fights were decision losses for Young, and all four of those fighters went on to win a piece of the heavyweight title. In those fights against Dokes, Page, Tubbs, and Tucker, Young was out-hustled and worked and not beaten up or punched around.