

Tyson & Jones: Just How Great

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Sunday, 17 October 2004 18:00

Why is it when Mike Tyson and Roy Jones lose, it must be examined and scrutinized to the nth degree? I heard he (Tyson) had Waffles instead of Pancakes for breakfast, he never punches in combination when he eats Waffles. HBO said he (Jones) watched the Honeymooners the night before he fought Virgil Hill, but he watched All In The Family the night before his rematch with Antonio Tarver.

Excuses like those are not far fetched when it comes to searching for a conspiracy explaining why either Mike Tyson or Roy Jones lost a fight. Other past and current greats are never afforded the same fluff excuses. The media and fans have to find some deep-dark rooted reason to justify how they lost to a mere mortal? It's never the other fighter beat them fair and square. It has to be something prevented them from winning.

Mike Tyson and Roy Jones were the benefactors of a very uneducated mainstream sports media that lacks insight and knowledge on the sport of boxing and its history. What do they know about history's all-time great fighters?

Sure, they probably know Joe Louis knocked out Max Schmeling, and Sugar Ray Robinson fought Jake LaMotta a bunch of times. But how many great fighters have they actually seen? And I'd be willing to bet that if Robert De Niro didn't play Jake LaMotta in the "Raging Bull", they'd think Sugar Ray Leonard was the original Sugar Ray?

The physical skill and talent of Tyson and Jones was obvious, making it easy for even the most novice boxing observer to become intoxicated by them. However, it takes more than talent, (power & speed) to be a great fighter. Which is often overlooked by many, or they just don't know any better. A fighter should never be considered great until he has faced a crisis, and has overcome it. As of this writing, the fighter has yet to be born who was so good he never had to prove how tough he was or what kind of a punch he could take.

Fighters with extreme talent like Tyson and Jones are always going to shine and look unbeatable against overmatched second-tier opposition. This blurs the fact that there are unanswered questions lingering over them about what kind of a punch they can take and what they're made of inside. Until that happens, the term all time great should not be thrown out. Great fighters are measured by how they do when they are matched against the best of the best. To me, a few conclusive wins over an outstanding/great fighter is a better testament to being a great fighter, then impressively beating a slew of has-beens and second-tier opposition.

Mike Tyson and Roy Jones were tagged great based on their potential and skill. It was assumed by many fans and media that they were so good they couldn't lose. That was supported by how they performed in the ring, despite fighting second tier fighters and never being tested. Impressive knockouts and one-sided decisions made it easy for many to buy into the hype and promotion that became almost mythic.

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I can only speak for myself, but when I see a fighter breeze through 37 fights never being met with any resistance, and then in his 38th fight he finally has to take as much as he gave—and he ultimately gets stopped—I think that what happened in the 38th fight says more about who he really is than the previous 37. That's just me.

When Mike Tyson was finally confronted with adversity, he lost. He never pulled out a win in a fight that he was knocked down in or losing. When he finally brushed up against the two best fighters of his era, he went 0-3, and won only 3 of 24 rounds against them, before being stopped by both—despite being younger and not fighting nearly as many top fighters as they did, resulting in him absorbing less punishment. Yet Tyson was afforded every excuse in the book.

The excuses ranged from him throwing the fight to being drugged by Don King. Or he took his opponent lightly and for granted. The one I love best is, neither Holyfield or Lewis fought the best Tyson. I hate to let facts ruin a good debate, but the reality is Tyson didn't face the best Holyfield or Lewis.

Roy Jones will be remembered as one of the fastest fighters in boxing history. Like Tyson, he built a following and legacy fighting on HBO. However, Jones fought a few part-time fighters, whose real professions were being a Fireman, a Policeman, a Schoolteacher, and a Sanitation worker, instead of has-beens and retreads. Against the majority of second tier fighters Jones fought, he dominated them and went fights without losing a minute, let alone a round.

Unlike Tyson, Jones won a 12-round decision over the two best fighters he fought, Bernard Hopkins and James Toney. But he faced Hopkins before he developed into the great fighter he eventually became, and Toney had to lose 27 pounds the week before fighting Jones.

Throughout his first 50 fights, there were two questions that lingered about Roy Jones. How good of a punch can he take, and how will he respond if he needs to rely on more than his skill to win? And some, myself included, thought that his overall caliber of opposition was carefully chosen. Although when a fighter continually wins, saying that he didn't beat anyone who was any good gets old and loses credibility.

In his first fight with Antonio Tarver, a depleted Jones toughed out a close decision. In the rematch with Tarver, a focused and in shape Jones won the first round, and was winning the second when he was caught by a big Tarver left and knocked out. The left by Tarver was the biggest punch Jones had ever taken in his career, and the only clean punch landed by Tarver in the fight.

In his next fight, Jones fought IBF light heavyweight champ Glencoffee Johnson. Johnson was 8-9-2 over the last seven years and 2-2-2 in his last 6 fights prior to fighting Jones. Jones was tentative and glove-shy during the entire fight with Johnson, who wasn't known to be a puncher. In the fifth round, Jones almost went down. In the ninth round Johnson knocked Jones out with a hybrid over hand right to the head. Jones was down for more than eight minutes, raising questions about his durability. As it was the case with Tyson, Jones was afforded every excuse in the book.

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For the majority of their careers, Mike Tyson and Roy Jones were hyped to be bigger than life because of their obvious physical skills. A lot of observers wanted to believe that because of their talent and skill, they couldn't lose unless there was something wrong with them. When a fighter is presumed bigger than life, it's human to want to find a reason to believe. Resulting in those who really believed they couldn't lose, to throw out boxing insight and logic. They were completely blurred by the impressive wins, never bothering to consider that they hadn't been confronted by boxing ultimate lie detector, adversity!

My issue with Mike Tyson and Roy Jones isn't that they weren't great fighters, because they were. The issue I have is how so many insist they were the greatest. When there is overwhelming evidence proving beyond any doubt that they definitely are not.

How can Tyson be the greatest when in his prime he was devastated by a 42-1 underdog, who never beat a top fighter in his career before or after Tyson. And because he was built up to be unbeatable, the fans and media made excuses for him. Citing things like he was bored with winning or drugged?

In his first fight with Evander Holyfield, he only won one round before he was stopped. Yet Holyfield had to be medically and physically cleared before the fight, that's how good he looked in his last two fights versus Riddick Bowe and Bobby Czyz. And in the rematch Tyson quit. When he couldn't hurt Holyfield in the first two rounds, when he is the most dangerous, he knew it was only a matter of time before he would be stopped. And some of his supporters have the gall to suggest that Holyfield never fought the best Tyson? In his last title fight against Lennox Lewis, he was never in it after the first round, taking a pummeling before being stopped in the eighth round.

Roy Jones demonstrated heart in his first fight with Antonio Tarver. But in the rematch, he was destroyed by one punch! There are no excuses for his showing in the rematch, he said he was in great shape and Tarver was going to get the real Roy this time. The truth is, he was knocked senseless by the best fighter he fought as light heavyweight champion. Not to mention Tarver is slightly older than Jones. After the fight he blamed his lack of motivation as to why he lost, but he never asked for a rematch.

He followed his loss to Tarver up by getting knocked cold by a fighter who was 2-2-2 in his last six fights. Again, he had a pocketful of excuses. Like losing too much weight a year earlier. First it was he's really a super middleweight, not a light heavyweight. Now making light heavyweight takes too much out of him? How many past greats were devastated by a fighter older than they are by one punch?

In my years of following and covering the sport of boxing, I've never seen two great fighters lose so decisively and still maintain the aura of invincibility, never. It's not like they lost close disputed decisions, they were knocked out and lost convincingly erasing all doubt. But some still believe that an untested Mike Tyson in his prime could have defeated any heavyweight who ever lived, and an untested prime Roy Jones was a better fighter than Sugar Ray Robinson? Both statements defy logic and reason being that so much fact and evidence suggest differently.

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In reality, there is more evidence supporting Mike Tyson lacked the mental toughness and character that history's greatest heavyweights possessed, than there is to support that the contrary. In regards to Roy Jones, there is more evidence that points to him having a suspect chin than there is that he doesn't. The common bond between Tyson and Jones is they both lost the biggest fights of their careers, and came up short in the only redemption fight they ever had. It can be said that they both failed the ultimate test that history's greatest fighters routinely passed.

I never got the e-mail or memo stating the only way the boxing universe is in balance is if Mike Tyson is the greatest heavyweight champ of all time, and Roy Jones is the greatest overall fighter in history. I know my boxing universe certainly isn't out of whack, because Tyson ain't the greatest heavyweight champ of all time, and Jones pays his way in to watch Sugar Ray shadow box.