

## Going Against My Own Belief: Never Again

Written by Frank Lotierzo  
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In following Boxing for the last 38 years, I've developed a few core beliefs that I stand by and usually never deviate from. Such as a Heavyweight must have a great chin in order to become a legitimate all-time great. It's not how many you beat, but it's who you beat. Another one is who did a fighter knockout is more telling than his KO percentage. The one I may actually feel the strongest about is the belief that you can't accurately rank a fighter until his career is complete. This is something I feel very strongly about and usually hold firm on.

Over the years I've resisted the temptation to get caught up in the euphoria of the moment after a fighter scores a spectacular victory in a big fight. It's impossible to rank a fighter historically until his career has heard it's final bell. Had Sonny Liston been in a serious car accident after the second Patterson fight and never fought again, he may have been held in a higher regard than Joe Louis as an all-time great. Liston was actually that highly thought of after knocking out Floyd Patterson twice. Had Liston never fought after Patterson, we would've never seen him lose to Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali. Against Ali we found out that Liston was somewhat of a front runner and couldn't handle a good boxer with speed and toughness like Ali.

The same thing applies to Mike Tyson. Although I never felt he was totally the genuine article because of his lack of mental toughness and character, had he retired after knocking out Michael Spinks in one round, he would've been ranked alongside of Louis and Ali. Had Tyson never fought after stopping Spinks, we would've never seen him get taken apart by Buster Douglas and Evander Holyfield. Now we know that he does not belong in the same sentence as either Louis or Ali as a fighter or in an historical sense.

This leads me to Roy Jones. In February of 2003 I wrote a piece titled "My Problem With Roy Jones," in this piece I outlined how all the hype around Roy Jones had escaped me. I also evaluated his level of competition and determined it was seriously lacking. In the piece I even said that I thought Sugar Ray Leonard at 147 was a better and tougher fighter than Jones was at any weight. Over the years I have had many debates/arguments with many fans and Boxing writers at some of the major fights in New York, Atlantic City, and Las Vegas. In a majority of those debates I was usually defending my opinion that Roy Jones is not all that some think he is. I always mentioned and insisted that Sugar Ray Leonard at 147 was the superior fighter to Roy Jones at any weight in the pound-for-pound rankings. I also professed that going back no more than 30 years, that Bob Foster, Michael Spinks, and Dwight Muhammad Qawi would have defeated Jones if all were at their peak.

When I looked at Jones' record and opponents I always came away thinking that if Foster, Spinks, and Qawi fought the same fighters that Jones did on the night he fought them, not only would they be undefeated, but they would've scored more knockouts. I was always firm on this, and never wavered. When I looked at Jones' record it was always the same thought, who are these guys. Other than Hopkins and Toney who did he really fight? Mike McCallum was 40 and shot and at the end of his career, and had fought his best years at 154. Virgil Hill was also shot and was taken apart by former Welterweight Champ Thomas Hearns six years before Jones

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landed the best punch he ever threw in his career.

In March of 2003, Roy Jones won a unanimous decision over WBA Heavyweight Champ John Ruiz. This is where I finally gave into the Jones mystique and overlooked the facts surrounding the fight with Ruiz. John Ruiz was a handpicked Heavyweight who had to fight under the watch of a referee who wouldn't let him fight his fight on the inside. By Ruiz not being able to fight a rough fight against the ropes and in the corners he may as well been handcuffed. Imagine Arthur Mercante breaking Joe Frazier every time he had Ali against the ropes or in a corner. Had that been the case, Frazier wouldn't have won a minute versus Ali in their first fight.

Then a funny thing happened. I actually grew tired of saying after every Jones victory that his opponent wasn't any good. I knew the Light Heavyweight era he dominated was paper thin, but still somebody among those fighters had to be pretty good. Finally, I started to come around on Roy Jones. In his first fight against Antonio Tarver he showed me something I always wanted to know the answer to, "how would he hold up on a night that he wasn't on top of his game versus a tough opponent?" Against Tarver I saw that this guy is really tough and is made up of some of the same grit and toughness as many past greats were. In the first Tarver fight, he sucked it up and won down the stretch pulling the fight out. That being said, I still ranked Foster and Spinks above him and felt they would better him in a head-to-head confrontation. Something I often repeated leading up to Jones-Tarver II.

Still, I thought about some of histories best Light Heavyweight's and felt at the least Jones was among the ten greatest. Probably between 7th and 10th. This is something I fought with myself over, but I just got tired of demeaning the caliber of opposition that he brushed up against continuously. So what I did was go against my own belief, I ranked Roy Jones before his career was finished. My mistake for not heeding my own advice. After years of being a lone wolf saying Jones isn't all that his press clipping profess, I give in and accept that maybe I'm wrong and I'm just missing it with him. Never again will I go against my own belief, regardless of how isolated it is.

I was in the same situation with Mike Tyson in 1986-88. Only with Tyson I stuck to my beliefs and feel that history eventually proved me right. Remember, I never questioned Tyson's physical talent, it was his mental makeup that I had serious doubts and questions about and felt that was the difference between him and the greatest of the greats. With Jones I was finally influenced by the overwhelming majority of fans and writers who were adamant that I was missing it with him. This is a mistake I'll never make again. Like with Tyson, I'll stand by my gut instinct and be proven right or wrong with out being influenced by the masses. Unlike with Jones where I tired of questioning every opponent after every fight and accepted that just maybe I'm missing it on this guy?

I remember having many arguments over whether or not he was in the same class as Michael Spinks. Never once did I second guess myself there. Spinks never lost to a Light Heavyweight and beat at least three fighters who would've beat Jones' stumbling block Antonio Tarver, in Marvin Johnson, Mustafa Muhammad, and Dwight Muhammad Qawi. I always admitted that Jones was flashier and faster than Spinks, but not the better or more versatile fighter. On top of that, when Spinks was finally stopped, it was by a prime Mike Tyson at his absolute peak in

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1988, who just happened to be one of the greatest punchers in Boxing History. Compare that to Tarver of 2004 who destroyed Jones. Not a contest at all comparing prime Tyson to prime Tarver. The same Tarver who looked ordinary at best versus Harding, Griffin, and Jones the first time. And to take it even further, can anyone say with a straight face that Tarver could've defeated Spinks once in 10 fights? The same Spinks who took the best from Eddie Mustafa Muhammad, Dwight Muhammad Qawi, Larry Holmes twice, and Gerry Cooney.

Seeing Roy Jones getting destroyed by Antonio Tarver reconfirms my thought that Spinks, Foster, and Qawi would have all beat Jones on each of their best nights. I'm not sure that I ranked Jones prematurely, but the fact that I have to go back and possibly reevaluate him will make me stick to my guns in believing that fighters should never be ranked until their career is complete. Roy Jones is the perfect example of why this is the only fair way to rank a fighter among the greatest of the greats. The career of Roy Jones may not be complete. What if he fights Tarver again and beats him. Or better yet, what if he fights Tarver again and loses?

To gain the best perspective on a fighters career, we must truly know where and when he was at his best. We also must evaluate how deep or thin the era was that he fought in. In order to make a balanced evaluation, we must have all the pertinent information. In all fairness, we can't possibly have all that information until the fighters career is complete.