Written by Sam Gregory
Monday, 25 October 2004 18:00

On Saturday, November 6th, Sharmba Mitchell is ready to finish the fight he started with Kostya Tszyu almost four years ago, on February 3rd, 2001. The title fight for Kostya Tszyu's Jr. Welterweight belt was stopped when Mitchell was unable to answer the bell for the eighth round due to a leg injury. Kostya Tszyu was declared the winner by TKO.

As for Mitchell's leg injury, there are conflicting stories. It's been written that Sharmba didn't want to go on after the 7th round and used the injury as an excuse to end the fight. The fact is Mitchell's leg was operated on due to the injury he sustained during the fight.

Tszyu has had his share of injuries since his last appearance in the ring as well. Injuries along with surgery have kept Tszyu out of the ring since January of 2003, a total of 22 months. Both fighters are now healthy and ready to finish the fight that will determine if Sharmba Mitchell walks away with Kostya Tszyu's Jr Welterweight belt.

I talked to Sharmba about his health, conditioning, and training for his up-coming fight with Tszyu.

When you look at the "Tale of the Tape" on paper, the stats for Sharmba Mitchell and Tszyu are similar in most, but not all, areas. The total number of fights for each fighter is Mitchell, 58 to Tszyu, 32. They both stand the same height at 5' 7". Mitchell has a five inch reach advantage and they both have plenty of speed and power.

But when it comes right down to it, the stats aren't as important as what happens in the ring next Saturday night.

Sharmba told me, "My 58 fights to Tszyu's 32 looks good on paper, but it doesn't come into play when we're in the ring. My ring experience does give me confidence, but it's mostly my ring generalship and my over-all speed that give me confidence. When we're in the ring, I'll fight him like he's been in the ring as many times as I have. I never under-estimate a fighter like Kostya Tszyu."

When I asked him the obvious question about Tszyu's 22 month layoff, Sharmba said, "The time Tszyu didn't fight, I don't pay any attention to it. I train to fight him like he never took a day off. As far as his speed is concerned, Tszyu is very fast. I think people underestimate his speed, and he hits very hard. I train for that and I expect he'll be as fast and hit as hard as he always did. Just look at the Trinidad fight," he said. "The time he (Trinidad) spent away from the ring didn't look like it hurt him at all."

I told him I understood what he meant, but Mayorga isn't in the same league with either himself, Tszyu or Trinidad for that matter.

"Yeah" he said, "That's why I can't take him (Tszyu) for granted."

Mentioning I have a few fight tapes featuring his fights, in particular his bouts with Ben Tackie and Michael Stewart, I told Sharmba how impressive his body attacks looked in both fights. Tszyu has been called a “Rhythm and Pressure” fighter, he likes it when he can set his feet and get punches off. But many believe Tszyu will not be able to do that against Mitchell because Mitchell will be in and out, side to side. I asked Sharmba if that would be part his game plan.

“First, I have to be fast, I don’t like getting hit. I’m too pretty to get hit too much, I don’t want to mess that up. Look, when I kiss my girlfriend, I don’t want her to be kissing some ugly guy whose face is all busted up. And yeah, I hit hard, I have to. I work on that a lot in the gym, but I’m just naturally a hard puncher. If I expect to beat Tszyu, which I will, I have to hit hard!”

I said to Sharmba, ‘In your fight with Ben Tackie, you launched an all out body attack, especially in the 2nd and 4th rounds. You did the same with Michael Stewart, knocking him down three times. At one of the post-fight interviews somebody asked you about rushing in for the knockout…you said you were too smart to rush right in…did you mean you just stuck to your game plan? And does that mean you plan to fight Tszyu more conservatively’?

A moment of silence on the phone … a chuckle … 2 words … NO CHANCE!!!

Assuring Sharmba I would let him get back to watching Oprah shortly—which is what he was doing when I called—I continued, “I’ve been told there’s no love lose between you and Zab Judah. Have you considered one day moving up to welterweight to fight Judah?”

“I thought about moving up to welterweight someday” Sharmba said, “But it doesn’t have anything to do with Judah. If I decide to beat him up, I’ll just go beat him up, but it doesn’t have anything to do with me moving up to welterweight.”

I told Sharmba, “I heard you don’t like to watch tapes of guys you’re in training to fight, is that true and why?”

“Yeah it’s true, I just don’t” Sharmba said. “I never really liked to watch tapes of other guys fighting. My trainer watches tapes of the other fighters, then I train the way he tells me to train.” Sharmba said he watched the tape of him and Tszyu right after the fight, but that’s about it.

I asked him if he had any thoughts on the Olympics. The U.S. Boxing Team only brought home three Gold Medals in the last four games.

“Scoring, it’s definitely the scoring,” Sharmba said. “It discourages the young guys and is a part of the sport that needs fixed.”

“When you fought in the Olympic Trials and lost to Kevin Kelly were you the youngest guy to compete? And how old were you?”

“Was I the youngest guy”? Sharmba said; “I’m not sure.”

“Well how old were you?”

"16…yeah I was definitely 16"

After concluding our conversation, I felt I had to watch Mitchell on tape again.

After watching Sharmba fight with the quickness, speed and determination he used in both the Ben Tackie and Michael Stewart fights, he'd be tough to beat if he does that on November 6th. If, on the other hand, he employs the same tactics he used earlier this year against Lovemore N' Dou, he could be in for a rough night.