

Evander Holyfield's Last Fight

Written by Marc Lichtenfeld

Sunday, 28 November 2004 18:00

"It's my life and I'll do what I want." – The Animals

By all accounts, Evander Holyfield's performance in his last fight against Larry Donald was abysmal. Donald, a talented underachiever, nearly pitched a shutout against the aged warrior. After the bout, Ron Stevens, the chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission, unilaterally decided to end Holyfield's career.

Stevens suspended the former champ for medical reasons because, "to my practiced mind, Holyfield shouldn't be fighting anymore." Stevens is well aware that a medical suspension in one state is honored by the other forty-nine. So, banning Holyfield from fighting in New York, prohibits him from competing anywhere in the United States.

I don't doubt Stevens' motives that he has the former champ's best interests at heart. Officials, journalists, myself included, and fans alike have been calling for Holyfield's retirement for several years now. However, barring evidence of an injury, the decision should be Holyfield's to make. Evander Holyfield has vowed to contest the decision. I hope he wins, gets the suspension lifted, and then gracefully hangs up the gloves and waits for the call from the Hall of Fame.

But should he win an appeal of his suspension and decide to get in the ring again – well, that's his right. As our men and women are overseas attempting to spread American style freedom, too many of our rights are being taken away right here at home.

I don't want to get into a big political discussion here, but government seems to have a notion that it must protect people from themselves. It is my belief that people have a right to do what they want, as long as it doesn't infringe on the rights of others. And if a man wants to earn a living as a professional boxer, as long as he is not physically unable to (and by that I mean an injury including one to the brain), he should have that right.

But let's say you disagree with me. And there are better minds than mine that do (including TheSweetScience.com's Matthew Aguilar). Why is Holyfield singled out? Because he's a former champ and is well loved? He is probably one of the few boxers that has the resources to be cared for, should boxing take its toll on him in the future. How about the countless others who are used as human punching bags for up and comers and have absolutely nothing to show for it?

Let's look at Holyfield's last few fights and compare his record to a few journeyman who are still permitted to box.

In Evander's last nine fights, he had a 12 round loss to 41-3-2 Larry Donald, a 9th round TKO loss to 66-4-2 James Toney, a 12 round loss to 35-2 Chris Byrd, an 8 round technical decision win over 35-3 Hasim Rahman (in which 2 judges gave all but one round to Holyfield), a loss, a

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draw, and a win after 36 rounds with John Ruiz, and a loss and a controversial draw after 24 rounds with Lennox Lewis.

The man was only knocked out once in his last nine, despite taking on the top talent in the division.

Now, let's look at some other heavyweights currently collecting paychecks.

J.C. Hilliard – 4-12 (3). He's forty-five years old and has lost his last six in a row, five by TKO. In his last bout, he was stopped by 1-0-1 Jeff Munson in two rounds. I was ringside for that fight. Jeff Munson is a tough brawler whose boxing skills are about on par with Ron Artest's people skills.

Onebo Maxime – 15-25 (11). He's only twenty-nine years old but has lost twenty-two of his last twenty-three, getting stopped eleven times. In his bout against Clifford Etienne in May, he suffered seven knockdowns. He went to the canvas several times in his last match against Sultan Ibragimov, before the referee mercifully waved it off in round five. He fights very good opposition, but gets blown out every time.

Ken Murphy – 22-21-2 (16). The former Cruiserweight title challenger has won once since 1998, a four round split decision win over 13-150-4 Donnie Pennelton. Murphy who started out at 21-0-1 has gone down hill ever since. While he has faced some solid competition, he can't hang with the Rydell Bookers and Orlin Norrises.

Donnie Pennelton – 13-159-5 (5). Donnie is forty years old and hasn't had his hand raised at the end of a boxing match in his last twenty-nine tries. He's also been stopped four times this year, thirty times in his career.

Don Tucker – 4-43 (2). Forty-five years old. Has been knocked out *thirty-two* times, including his last five in a row.

Playing around on Boxrec.com for ten minutes will yield an abundant crop of boxers in every division with similar records and circumstances. Yet to my knowledge, very few, if any, are suspended for medical reasons.

Boxing commissions cannot take away the livelihoods of men and women on a whim. If suspensions are needed to protect boxers, then an agreed upon criteria must be met in order for a suspension to occur.

Until that happens, here's one fight I hope Holyfield takes head on – and then walks away from the next one.