

Tarver and Johnson Might Thank Jones Jr.

Written by Rick Folstad
Friday, 17 December 2004 18:00

You have to wonder how Roy Jones Jr., is sleeping these days, if he's restless and still wide awake at 3 a.m., or if he's dead to the world by midnight.

I'm guessing he sleeps pretty well most nights, that it's easy to fall asleep wrapped in silk sheets, knowing you'll never have to work another day in your life if you don't want to.

Still, you've got to figure that once in awhile, the ghost of "what was" and "what could have been," slips quietly into his room and keeps him awake by poking him in the ribs and whispering in his ear until sunrise.

You remember Roy Jones Jr. He used to be something special back a few months ago, back before the unexpected arrival of Antonio Tarver and Glen Johnson, back when there were fewer bar-room arguments over who the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world was.

It was Jones and then everyone else.

He's the reason so many casual fight fans will be watching TV tonight on HBO, when Tarver (22-2, 18 KOs) and Johnson (41-9-2, 28 KOs) fight at the Staples Center in Los Angeles to prove who is the meanest, toughest, best light-heavyweight in the world is.

When the fight is finally over, each boxer can thank Jones for giving him the biggest pay day of his career, Tarver earning about \$2.5 million and Johnson taking home a tidy \$1.5 million.

Jones is the reason they're fighting. Maybe they should each cut him a check, a little payback for all the help.

It wasn't that long ago that the light-heavyweight division was a solo act, a one-man show with the same ending fight after fight. You kept waiting to see if someone could test Jones, rise up out of obscurity and take him into the later rounds of a close fight.

But it never seemed to happen.

Instead, they were usually short, violent nights, a few rounds of cat and mouse and then a final round of one-sided fury. You'd shake your head, mutter under your breath about another boring fight, and wonder if they would ever find some fighter who could put an end to all the beatings, could silence the cockiness which has always been a part of who Jones is.

We never expected two of them to show up in a span of only four months, Tarver stopping Jones in the second round in May, and Johnson stopping him in September in nine rounds.

For the first time in years in the light-heavyweight division, Jones isn't on center stage.

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Tonight's fight is the last big fight of the year, and a good way to end it, with a clash of styles.

It's the tall, articulate, smooth-talking Tarver against the shorter, quieter, get-to-the-point Johnson, a guy who always comes to fight, but doesn't always do well when he gets there.

They will be fighting for fame and fortune, but they won't be fighting for a belt. Both gave up that opportunity when they agreed to fight each other instead of the mandatory challengers, Tarver giving up his WBC championship and Johnson turning in his IBF title.

Regardless of what they might say, going for the big money probably wasn't a tough decision to make.

"There are no certainties in boxing," Tarver said on a recent conference call. "You have to take advantage of the moment. I didn't lose my title in the ring, I vacated it. You can't pay the light bill or feed your kids with those belts."

Johnson agreed.

"I have the same picture in front of me," he said. "You have to take the opportunity when it presents itself, otherwise it can slip away."

Jones knows how quick it can go.