

Is Tarver Still Better Than Spinks

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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This past May 15th, former light heavyweight champion Antonio Tarver knocked out undisputed light heavyweight champion Roy Jones in the second round of their rematch. Before fighting the rematch with Jones, Tarver was best known for splitting two fights with Eric Harding, winning a solid decision over Montell Griffin, and losing a close majority decision to Jones in their first fight.

On the night of the Jones-Tarver rematch, I wonder if I had stood at the entrance of the fight venue taking a poll of those attending the fight, asking them who would've won had the Antonio Tarver who is fighting Jones tonight fought the Michael Spinks who won the WBA light heavyweight title from champ Eddie Mustafa Muhammad? I think that's a fair question. Tarver had just given Jones the toughest fight of his career. And some fight observers, although they're wrong, thought Tarver deserved the decision that night. Tarver's stock clearly had never been higher than it was the night of the Jones rematch.

That being said, I would be more than willing to bet an overwhelming majority of those I surveyed would say that Michael Spinks would've soundly defeated the Antonio Tarver who was only hours from fighting Jones for the second time. In the most anticipated light heavyweight title fight of Roy Jones' tenure as light heavyweight champion, Tarver knocked him out with one big hybrid left hand in the second round to win back the title.

The fight started with Jones coming out more aggressive than he usually does in the first round, and he clearly won the round. In fact, Tarver didn't land a single meaningful punch in the first round. Jones came out in the second round picking up where he left off in the first. A little past the midway point of the round, Tarver beat Jones to the punch with a massive left, knocking him out. Before connecting with his lottery punch on Jones, Tarver had been credited with landing just six punches by Compubox punch statisticians.

Within weeks after scoring the biggest victory of his career, Tarver was the talk of the boxing world and was often mentioned as a future opponent for fighters such as Bernard Hopkins, James Toney, Vasilliy Jirov, and Mike Tyson. Tarver was also starting to be talked about as a great fighter. It was only a short time after stopping Jones that Tarver was being compared favorably to Michael Spinks.

Michael Spinks happens to be the most accomplished light heavyweight champion in the 101 year history of the division. He went undefeated while fighting at light heavyweight, going 11-0 in title fights as the division's ruler. Not to mention he was the first reigning light heavyweight champion to win the heavyweight title by defeating the reigning heavyweight champion, who just so happened to be 48-0 Larry Holmes.

As unbelievable as it may seem, there were actually boxing fans suggesting that Tarver - based on his knockout of Roy Jones - may have been as good as Spinks. When I heard that I didn't even get the slightest bit mad or upset. It just confirmed for me that many fans and writers crave

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to see greatness so badly that they base far too much on one fight.

Less than a month after beating Jones in their rematch, Antonio Tarver was being compared favorably with one of history's greatest light heavyweight champions and fighters, and this was based solely on one punch. Prior to beating Jones, Tarver was viewed as one of the upper-tier light heavyweight contenders in a sub-par era. But he was never mentioned as a possible all-time great. And the thought of comparing him favorably as a fighter with Michael Spinks was beyond comprehension. Again, based on nothing more than what has to be considered a lottery punch landed on Roy Jones, Tarver went from top contender to all-time great?

Someday those who base everything on one great/outstanding fight will learn not to rush to judgment so foolishly.

This past weekend Antonio Tarver fought for the first time since knocking out Roy Jones seven months ago. His opponent was a fighter named Glencoffee Johnson who also knocked out Roy Jones in his last fight. Heading into his fight with Tarver, Johnson was 9-9-2 in his last 20 fights and 3-2-2 in his last seven. During the week of the Tarver-Johnson bout, many prediction polls were taken among boxing's finest and most astute observers and followers. In every poll taken, Tarver was picked to beat Johnson by at least 80% of those polled.

In what has to be the best year of Johnson's professional boxing career, he closed it out by winning a 12 round split decision over Tarver. With upset wins in his last two fights over the two best fighters in the division, Johnson is now viewed as the top light heavyweight fighter in boxing.

Guess what I heard today?

In what is becoming more and more routine in sports, boxing certainly being no exception. I heard and read some writers and fans questioning how Johnson matched up with former beast and WBC light heavyweight champion Dwight Muhammad Qawi, the former Dwight Braxton. However, don't worry about me losing it, because I view it as progress and a sign of hope. At least they waited for Johnson to win two big fights before making ridiculous statements and comparisons.

Forget about Qawi vs. Johnson, I just want to know if Antonio Tarver is still better than Michael Spinks.