

James Toney - The Interviews Are Great, But How About Fighting

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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I recently caught Heavyweight contender James "Light Out" Toney being interviewed. During the interview Toney was certainly at his brilliant best verbally. During the interview Toney trashed just about every fighter out there, Vitali Klitschko, Chris Byrd, Vassiliy Jirov, Bernard Hopkins and Antonio Tarver just to name a few. In the interview, Toney said, "I'll knock Vitali's ass out," he referred to Chris Byrd as "bitch Byrd," said that Lamon Brewster is "straight sh*t from the bowl," and about Antonio Tarver, " I'd break that skinny bitch a new ass*le." Don't get me wrong, I loved the trash talking of Muhammad Ali back in the day. Like Ali, the NBA's Charles Barkley was also a blast to listen too.

The way I see it, there is a differences between Ali and Barkley, not that Barkley was on Ali's level but, Ali and Barkley did there trash talking with a twinkle in their eye. Unlike Toney, who either does it to get attention or is just plain and simple a mean spirited guy. I don't even have a problem if Toney's rants come from a mean spirited and nasty disposition. The problem I have is that Toney hasn't risen to the level yet as a Heavyweight fighter where he sounds anything but foolish kicking sand on some of today's top Heavyweights, despite the lack of outstanding fighters currently ranked at the top of the division. During the 1960's and 1970's, Ali was often quoted as saying, "It ain't braggin if you do it." Toney hasn't done it yet, at least not in the Heavyweight division.

I know that Toney is the darling of the fans in the Heavyweight division right now, and I more than recognize his ability and skill as a fighter. No doubt Toney is truly an outstanding/great fighter, who has a cast-iron chin and an indomitable will. Those are all indisputable facts, but to me the burden of proof is still on James Toney regarding his place in the Heavyweight division. Yes, I know Toney took Evander Holyfield apart in his last fight, and there is much to be said for any fighter who takes Holyfield apart. But the fact of the matter is the Holyfield that Toney beat was the same relic of a fighter as the Louis that Marciano knocked out and the Ali that Holmes pummeled. The last time Holyfield resembled anything close to a great fighter was in November of 1997 when he stopped Michael Moorer.

After 1997 Holyfield looked bad against Vaughn Bean, ring worn against Lennox Lewis in 1999, and totally shot in his trilogy with John Ruiz. Other than a few rounds in his fight with Hasim Rahman, Holyfield has been an empty package. He looked like Joe Louis against Ezzard Charles when he met Chris Byrd, and like the Ray Leonard who fought Hector Camacho in 1996 when he faced Toney. By the time Toney beat Holyfield, he was seven years removed from being anything close to the Holyfield that history will look back on as an all-time great Heavyweight.

However, Toney continues to trash Vitali Klitschko and Chris Byrd, like his resume even comes close to theirs regarding accomplishments in the Heavyweight division. In the Heavyweight division Toney has exactly one win, over an even more eroded Holyfield than the one Byrd beat 11 months earlier. Compare that to Byrd who holds a win over the perceived best Heavyweight in the World, Vitali Klitschko. I know that Klitschko was leading in his fight versus Byrd and lost

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because of a shoulder injury. The fact is Byrd was in there with him and hadn't been outclassed or beaten so badly that he couldn't come on and seize the fight if Klitschko broke down, and he did.

Byrd has also defeated the best two-handed puncher in the division in David Tua. I would love to have seen Toney in with the August 2002 version of Tua that Byrd gave a Boxing lesson. Byrd has also fought the two most hyped Heavyweights since Mike Tyson of 1985-86, Ike Ibeabuchi and Wladimir Klitschko. When Byrd fought Ike and Wladimir, they were at their best and many were predicting that they would own the Heavyweight division for years to come. And only Ibeabuchi went through him. I wonder if Toney would've fared any better than Byrd did versus the Ibeabuchi who Byrd faced?

Lately, Vitali Klitschko has been another target of Toney's famed verbal daggers. As of this writing Vitali is viewed in many Boxing circles as the World's top Heavyweight. This is based on his last three fights over the past year. In those fights he fought World Champ Lennox Lewis on more than even terms, he destroyed top contender Kirk Johnson in two rounds, and stopped Corrie Sanders in his last fight to win the vacant WBC title. He has also fought IBF Champ Chris Byrd when he was the most avoided fighter in the division. Although the record says he lost to Byrd, he was ahead in the fight before he injured his shoulder. Compare that to Toney's claim to fame of beating a totally washed up Evander Holyfield. I will, Toney's accomplishments are not even in the same zip code of either Klitschko or Byrd.

In his interview Toney said, "I'll knock Vitali's ass out." I say based on what, Holyfield? Klitschko stood up to the bombs of Lennox Lewis, and never appeared close to going out. Lewis is a lifetime better puncher than Toney. Toney hit Vassiliy Jirov with a million punches and only dropped him in the last round when he was spent. I doubt Toney could hurt Vitali if he stood in front of Toney with his hands at his side and let Toney unload with his best power shots. Not to mention that Toney's quicker hands and head and shoulder feints would be a non-factor in a fight versus Vitali. Vitali is just too big and strong for Toney to out-box, and that would be Toney's only shot in a potential fight with him. His size and strength would be too much for Toney to overcome. The only question is if Toney would get stopped or make it through to hear the decision announced.

I know how good James Toney is and what he is capable of doing in the ring. However, I need to see more than him picking on a shot former great who hasn't resembled anything close to a great fighter in over seven years. Toney is funny and colorful, no doubt a plus for Boxing. It's just that his rants are becoming hollow and tiresome to me. I need to see him take apart one of the World's top Heavyweight's so I can again be entertained by his antics and rants. Who will ever forget his interview with Showtime hired Bulldog Jim Gray after his fight with Holyfield. Can't wait to see it again if and when Toney fights and possibly beats one of today's so-called Heavyweight elite.

From 1994 to 2003 Toney was all but forgotten. He proved he was still one of the World's premier fighters in the Jirov fight. After that he pushed Holyfield off the cliff, although Evander was already half way down it. With his Achilles now healed, hopefully we'll see Toney signing for a major fight soon.