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Tuesday, 01 February 2005 18:00

To most boxing historians and observers, the 1970s are often referred to as one of the best eras in heavyweight history. Some may try to dispute it, but the '70s heavyweights are on par with the heavyweights from any other decade in boxing history. For those who adamantly disagree, my only retort is that you're flat-out wrong and must have some sort of agenda.

From 1970 through 1979, four all-time greats held the heavyweight title. During the years 1970-79 there were three all-time greats who held the undisputed crown: Joe Frazier, George Foreman and Muhammad Ali. Larry Holmes held the WBC title and carried the torch as the heavyweight standard-bearer from mid-1978 through the end of the decade until 1985. Today the heavyweights from the '70s are best remembered for the Ali-Frazier trilogy and the awesome and devastating power of George Foreman.

This past Thursday, January 27, 55-year-old Larry Holmes issued a challenge to 56-year-old former champ George Foreman during a press conference for casinofortune.com, an online casino that just celebrated its two-millionth customer. The president of the company, Dennis Rose, said he's willing to bankroll a Foreman-Holmes fight, saying "We'll back our man [Holmes] all the way."

Last month I wrote how the overwhelming accomplishments and persona of Muhammad Ali overshadow both Foreman and Holmes. Maybe, in the case of Holmes, Foreman also cast a shadow over him as well. It's quite obvious Holmes is obsessed with trying to prove to the public that he could have, and is still capable of, defeating Foreman. On top of that he continues to try and perpetuate the myth about how Foreman ducked him while both were active during the '70s. This, however, is not true, and I'm definitely not a Foreman apologist. Nothing more than a simple examination of their careers starting in June of 1969 through March of 1977 is required, along with a few other things that have been forgotten over the years to squash the myth Holmes is trying to rewrite as history. What becomes evident is that the window of opportunity to make Foreman-Holmes was very short-lived. The reality is: during the only six months the fight could have been realized, the obstacles came from the Holmes camp.

1969-72

It was in October of 1968 that 19-year-old George Foreman won the heavyweight Gold Medal at the Summer Olympics. Eight months later on June 23, 1969, Foreman knocked out Don Waldhelm in his pro debut on the undercard of the Joe Frazier-Jerry Quarry heavyweight title bout at Madison Square Garden. By the end of 1969 Foreman was 13-0 (11). From January 1970 through December 1972 Foreman went 24-0. During that two-year span the only fighter who went the distance with him was veteran Gregorio Peralta in a bout that was part of the Joe Frazier-Jimmy Ellis title fight undercard.

1973

On January 22, 1973, as a 3-1 underdog, 24-year-old George Foreman, with a record of 37-0

(34), stopped undisputed heavyweight champion Joe Frazier 29-0 (25) in two rounds to capture the title. Two months later, on March 21, Larry Holmes won a four round decision over Rodell Dupree in his pro debut. Before turning pro, Holmes was best known for being stopped by Duane Bobick in the finals at the 1972 Olympic Trials. In his last fight of 1973, Holmes was knocked down by Kevin Isaac in the second round. Holmes came back in the third to stop Isaac and finish the year at 7-0 (3).

1974

The year 1974 started quickly on January 28 with number one contender Muhammad Ali winning a 12-round unanimous decision over former champ Joe Frazier in their rematch to even them at 1-1. In March 1974, Foreman knocked out number two ranked Ken Norton in two rounds to make the second successful defense of his title. Foreman's win over Norton and Ali's win over the third-ranked Frazier cleared the way for a showdown between the world's top ranked heavyweight contender and the undefeated and undisputed heavyweight champion.

Back in October of 1974, many respected boxing historians and ex-world champions said that they believed that George Foreman was the strongest and hardest punching heavyweight champion in boxing history – something that is endorsed by many even to this day. Former heavyweight greats Jack Dempsey and Joe Louis, who both knew a thing or two about punching, agreed that Foreman was the most powerful heavyweight they had ever seen. The prevailing thought going into the Foreman-Ali fight wasn't if Foreman would win, but how much punishment would Ali endure before he was stopped? Many fighters who had been in the ring with both fighters either as a sparring partner or an opponent all agreed that if Ali tried to lay against the ropes to save his energy instead of using his legs to stay away, Foreman might beat him to death.

On October 29, 1974, as a 3-1 underdog, Ali stopped Foreman in the eighth round to regain the undisputed heavyweight title. But let's clear something up. Ali didn't beat Foreman by out-boxing him. He beat him because he had a cast-iron chin and took a punch to the body better than any other heavyweight in boxing history. Ali only really got to Foreman after enduring a terrific pounding. He has said many times over the years that Foreman cut off the ring too effectively and if he tried boxing him he would have been totally spent after about eight rounds. To say that Foreman was defeated by Ali because he was out-boxed could not be more wrong. Unless someone else was in the ring with Ali during the fight, I'd say Ali has the best insight as to what was going on during the fight. It was Ali's toughness and durability that enabled him to survive Foreman's assault. Had Ali been just a little less resilient and physically strong, he would have been stopped.

After losing to Ali, Foreman was totally destroyed mentally. Unlike Mike Tyson, Foreman really did believe that he was unbeatable and would knockout every opponent he would ever face. Ali standing up to his power and being able to fight back and beat him is something he and his trainer Dick Saddler couldn't envision before he fought Ali. By the end of 1974 Foreman was an ex-champ sporting a record of 40-1 (37). Larry Holmes completed his second year as a pro by stopping Joe Hathaway in the first round to bring his record to 10-0 (6).

1975

In 1975 Holmes increased his activity and fought nine times going 9-0 (8). For George Foreman, 1975 was the year the residual affects of losing to Ali began to surface. In his only ring appearance, in April, he took on five different opponents in an exhibition in Toronto, Canada. Foreman looked bad during the exhibition and was never sure how he wanted to fight. His instinct was to go for the early kill, but in the back of his mind it was obvious he was questioning his stamina, causing him to hold back. The purpose of the exhibition was to show the public he had staying power and could fight 15-rounds if he was forced to. However it failed miserably. What the Toronto-5 exhibition really showed was that Foreman left the city of Zaire a different fighter than the one who arrived.

At the conclusion of the third most significant heavyweight fight of the ‘70s and last major heavyweight fight of 1975, Muhammad Ali sat on his stool in his corner exhausted after defeating Joe Frazier in the "Thrilla in Manila." During a ring interview with the late Don Dunphy, Ali was asked if George Foreman was next. Ali said that he heard Foreman wants a rematch, but nobody has seen him or knows where he's at. He followed that up saying he'd like to get out of boxing before he dies from a heart attack, but if Foreman is available and ready he would definitely fight him again. Ali said Foreman was the only big fight left out there for him and after that he would retire.

1976

Foreman must have heard what Ali told Dunphy and returned to the ring on January 24, 1976. In his first bout since losing the title to Ali fourteen months earlier, Foreman returned to the ring to fight the hard punching top contender Ron Lyle. This time around Foreman was trained by Gil Clancy, who replaced Dick Saddler who took over as Foreman's manager. Clancy tried to convert Foreman from a fighter who fought in a rage trying to end the fight with every punch to a more measured boxer-puncher. Foreman said he only came back to reclaim the title from Ali and wanted to fight the best available, so Ali had no one left to fight but him.

In Lyle's two bouts before taking on Foreman, he was stopped in the 11th round in his only title shot by Muhammad Ali. Lyle fought the hard punching Earnie Shavers after losing to Ali and stopped him in the sixth round. The Foreman-Lyle bout was a Pier-6 Brawl from the second round on. The fourth round was highlighted by three knockdowns, with Lyle going down once and Foreman twice. The fifth round picked up where the fourth left off and midway through the round Foreman trapped Lyle in a corner and stopped him after landing a barrage of unanswered bombs. It was obvious in his fight with Lyle that Foreman lacked stamina, and trying to fight a measured fight almost got him knocked out.

Five days after Foreman-Lyle, Larry Holmes fought for the first time in 1976 stopping Joe Gholston (15-9-2) to raise his record to 20-0 with 15 KOs. In his second fight back, Foreman fought a rematch with Joe Frazier on June 15th and stopped him in the fifth round to run his record to 42-1 (39). Larry Holmes fought twice after beating Gholston and decisioned Roy "Tiger" Williams in April in what turned out to be his last fight of 1976.

It was shortly after Foreman stopped Frazier in June of 1976 that Dick Saddler started accusing Ali of ducking Foreman and fighting wrestlers like Antonio Inoki. Saddler also said

that he would like Foreman to fight the Ali wannabe, Larry Holmes, if they can't get the real thing. Saddler said Holmes, who at the time was 22-0 (16), would be a perfect opponent to help Foreman get ready for a rematch with Ali. However, Foreman-Holmes wasn't a draw at the time and there were a few obstacles pertaining to Holmes that quashed the fight.

The first was that Holmes' trainer at the time, Richie Giachetti, wanted no part of matching his fighter with Foreman. In August 1976, Foreman stopped Scott LeDoux on CBS in a bout that was called by Jerry Quarry and Tom Brookshier. Quarry passed along to Brookshier that he spoke to Giachetti a couple days before Foreman fought LeDoux and asked him what he thought about shutting up Saddler and matching Holmes with Foreman. According to Brookshier, Quarry said Giachetti told him "There's no way I'm putting Larry in there with that Friggin' Animal Foreman."

The other problem was Don King, who was promoting both Foreman and Holmes. Because of Ali's manager Herbert Muhammad, who was not a Don King fan, to say the least, King only promoted a couple of Ali's fights and had no multi-fight contract. King's involvement with Ali was on a fight to fight basis, simply because Herbert Muhammad wanted to pit all three major television networks against each other to bid for Ali's title defenses. King didn't want to risk the fighter he was banking on to pick up the torch after Ali and Foreman were out of the picture possibly getting knocked off before he could line him up for a title shot.

On top of that, Holmes had no following at all and only those who were involved in boxing thought he had potential to one day win the title. And King was also very frustrated by Holmes not making much of an impression with the networks and fans. He could see Holmes being stopped in a high profile bout. That is why he held his own heavyweight box-off called the U.S. Tournament, which turned out to be a total farce.

During 1976, heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali made four title defenses. In the two most high profile defenses of the year, Ali won a disputed decision over Jimmy Young and, in his last defense of '76, he won a unanimous decision over Ken Norton. Some thought he lost to Norton, but I don't agree. Two weeks after Ali defeated Norton, Foreman stopped Dino Dennis in his fourth bout since losing the title to Ali and finished the year as the top ranked heavyweight in the world. 1976 ended with the top three contenders for Ali's title being Foreman, Norton and Young.

Although Holmes boasted a good record at 22-0 (16), he was not even an afterthought in the title picture at the end of 1976. Despite his claims of being cheated out of some big fights at the time, he had not looked impressive up to that point and questions about his heart, chin and punch hovered over him. His best wins were over the likes of Rodney Bobick, on the undercard of the "Thrilla in Manila," and Roy Williams. Williams was a great gym fighter but froze in the big bouts and lost to just about every good fighter he fought.

Talk of a Foreman-Holmes bout ceased by the end of 1976. It was obvious that Don King thought the fight was not a good one to make. He was frustrated because the fighters he felt comfortable risking Holmes against were fighters nobody cared about and brought him no attention. And he believed the fighters who could bring him notoriety were too risky for

Holmes.

Foreman would have been a huge favorite over Holmes and was too dangerous. The Holmes of mid-1978 had his hands full with Norton. In 1976 Norton was better than he was in 1978 and would have been able to wear down the 1976 Holmes. That left Jimmy Young and Ali. In 1976 there were too many big fights out there to warrant Ali fighting Holmes, not to mention that Holmes wasn't ready. And King wasn't foolish enough to risk Holmes against Jimmy Young, who was great at making his opponents look bad and beating fighters who were supposed to beat him.

1977

Larry Holmes kicked off 1977 by winning an eight-round decision over Tom Prater to win King's U.S. Tournament. Six days later Foreman stopped journeyman Pedro Agosto to go 5-0 (5) in his march to an Ali rematch. Since Saddler couldn't convince King or the Holmes camp to make Foreman-Holmes, they settled for another slick boxer to prep Foreman for a pending rematch with Ali. On March 17, 1977, George Foreman and Larry Holmes fought on the same card for the only time in their career. In an undercard bout at the Roberto Clemente Coliseum in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Holmes (23-0 17 KOs) stopped Horace Robinson (5-2) in the fifth round. In the main event, number one contender George Foreman (45-1 42 KOs) fought number three ranked Jimmy Young in a title elimination bout to determine who would be the mandatory challenger for Ali's title.

For the first six rounds against Young, Foreman never fought so passively or looked so out of it. In the seventh round Foreman finally threw a couple bombs at Young and almost knocked him out with a big left hook. Young got through the round and Foreman tired badly as the fight wore on. In the twelfth round Foreman was so exhausted that a Young flurry made him stumble to a knee for a brief second. It was ruled a knockdown. In what was voted Ring Magazine’s Fight of the Year, Foreman lost a unanimous decision to Young and retired in his dressing room after the fight.

Holmes fought twice more in 1977, stopping Fred Houpe and Ibar Arrington to finish the year with a record of 26-0 (19). It wasn't until March 25, 1978, one year after Foreman lost to Young, that Holmes showed he had the pedigree of a future heavyweight champ. It wasn't until his 27th fight, against perennial heavyweight contender Earnie Shavers, that Holmes had finally arrived. Shavers was seven months removed from losing a 15-round unanimous decision to Muhammad Ali in what was his first of two title shots. In his bout against Shavers, Holmes won all twelve rounds and never looked better or more complete. Three months later Holmes won a 15-round split decision over Ken Norton to win the WBC heavyweight title. And the rest is fistic history.

The fact is there was only about a six-month window during 1976 that a Foreman-Holmes bout could realistically be made. From June through December of 1976 there was some talk of matching them. I believe Holmes was willing and would have agreed to the fight, but at the same time I have no doubt Foreman would have jumped at the opportunity had it been offered. But Holmes showed nothing through December of 1976 indicating he had the potential to be a special fighter, let alone the great one he went on to become.

The reason Foreman-Holmes never happened is because at the time when it could have been made, Holmes management and promoter Don King wanted no part of Foreman. They just weren't confident Holmes at that time could have stood up to Foreman long enough for him to tire. And guess what? Nobody else thought so either. Holmes was still two years away from blossoming into a special heavyweight fighter.

If you need a goat to blame for never seeing Foreman-Holmes, blame Holmes' management and Don King for doing the right thing by Holmes, because Larry Holmes was nowhere close to being ready for George Foreman in 1976, despite Clancy messing Foreman up. You can also blame Jimmy Young. In fact, you can also blame Young for being the reason why we never saw Ali-Foreman II. Had Foreman defeated Young, we would have seen him fight Ali in September of 1977, instead of Ali fighting Shavers.

Today Larry Holmes is campaigning to fight George Foreman. His selling point is that Foreman ducked him in the '70s and is ducking him now. That statement is only half true. It was Holmes and his management who looked the other way when Foreman and Saddler viewed the fight as a tune-up for a rematch with Ali. So the blame is on the Holmes faction as to why it didn't happen over 25 years ago.

Today, however, I believe Foreman has no interest in fighting Holmes for a few significant reasons. First of all, he knows beating Holmes does nothing for him at this stage of the game - which is the opposite for Holmes. Holmes beating Foreman somewhat justifies him as the number two heavyweight of the Golden Era.

Holmes knows that he cannot overtake Ali in the pantheon of all-time heavyweight greats. That leaves Frazier and Foreman.

In a head to head matchup between Frazier and Holmes at their peak, most observers are split on who would have won. Holmes is usually ranked above Frazier because of the 20 consecutive title defenses he made over his seven year reign as champ. That leaves Foreman. Because of the power Foreman still possessed during his comeback, which resulted in some impressive knockouts, not to mention that he won the title from the lineal champ and Holmes didn't, Foreman's comeback is viewed as being more successful than Holmes' was. That's why Holmes wants the Foreman name on his record. He believes since Foreman is only 11 months older than he is, beating him now means he would have beat him when both were at their peak.

The other reason Foreman has no interest in fighting Holmes, besides there not being an upside regarding career stature, is there isn't enough money in it. One thing Foreman and Holmes both crave is dead Presidents, but in that tale of the tape, Foreman is the champ and money is his passion, even more than it is for Holmes. No way is Foreman going to give Holmes the chance to gain career stature without getting paid for it. Added to that, Holmes has the strategic style advantage. No way Foreman goes for it unless the money is so monumental that even he can't walk away from it.

Writer's Note

Who would have won had they fought at their best? The best Foreman was the one who fought from late 1972 through October 1974 when he lost to Ali. The best Holmes fought during the years 1979-82. In my opinion, the undefeated Foreman of ‘73-‘74 would have beaten the undefeated Holmes of ‘80-‘82. I don't believe Holmes could have survived the Foreman that Muhammad Ali survived.

Remember, Ali didn't beat Foreman by boxing him, and I don't think Holmes could have either. Ali had to endure a helluva beating to the head and body before he could take advantage of a spent George Foreman. After losing to Ali, Foreman doubted his stamina and was finished emotionally. This led to the measured style he fought under the tutelage of Gil Clancy. And that's why he lost to Jimmy Young. Had the Zaire version of Foreman fought Young, Foreman would have won inside three rounds.

So from my perspective, the very best Foreman I ever saw would have defeated the very best Holmes I ever saw. However, I think the post-Ali version of Foreman would have been decisioned by Holmes. I know that both are among the top six or seven greatest heavyweight champions of all-time. That being said, George Foreman of 2005, who has not fought in almost eight years, has no interest in fighting Larry Holmes of 2005 who last fought in 2002.