

Judah Should Make First Defense Against De La Hoya

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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"I want Oscar." So says undisputed welterweight champion Zab Judah. It was just last week that Judah stopped former champ Cory Spinks in the ninth round of their rematch to capture the title. In their first fight last April, Spinks retained the title when he outboxed Judah over twelve rounds winning a unanimous decision.

Judah was admonished by many observers after that bout for not fighting more aggressively against Spinks with the undisputed title on the line. After being dropped by Spinks in the eleventh round, Judah came back in the twelfth to hurt Spinks and knock him down.

In the rematch Judah fought more aggressively and let his hands go, something he didn't do nearly enough in their first fight. In the ninth round Judah dropped Spinks with a series of combinations that started with a hard left. Spinks beat the count but was almost out on his feet. Judah went on the attack catching Spinks with a series of hooks to the body and head. After motioning to the referee, Judah scored with a couple more unanswered punches which started Spinks on the way down as the fight was waved off by referee Armando Garcia.

The win over Spinks solidifies Judah as the undisputed welterweight champion and positions him for what he hopes to be a mega fight by the end of the year. For Judah, his timing couldn't be better. Since being stopped in his last fight by middleweight champ Bernard Hopkins last September, former welterweight champion Oscar De La Hoya has said that he's moving down to welterweight. De La Hoya hasn't held the welterweight title since losing a controversial decision to Felix Trinidad in September of 1999. And for the record, De La Hoya beat Trinidad 115-113.

For Judah, De La Hoya is the perfect opponent to defend the undisputed title against. The way I see it, Judah isn't 50-50 to hold the title for any lengthy period of time. With fighters like Kosta Tzsyu and Floyd Mayweather talking about moving up from junior welterweight to welterweight, and Shane Mosley and De La Hoya saying they can make 147 to campaign again at welterweight, how long can Judah realistically hold the title?

Not too long.

If Judah signed tomorrow to make the first defense of his title against Tzsyu, Mayweather, Mosley or De La Hoya, he'd be a significant underdog to all four. He's already fought Tzsyu and was stopped in two rounds. In a bout against Mayweather, how is he supposed to win? He certainly isn't going to outbox Mayweather, and no way is Zab a big enough puncher to dream about stopping Mayweather. Not to mention that the money wouldn't be great enough to risk losing the title in his first defense, since neither he or Mayweather have drawing power at the box-office.

That leaves Mosley and De La Hoya. If Mosley can get down to 147 for a fight with Judah, Zab would leave the ring as the former welterweight champ. Plain and simple, Judah has nothing

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with which to beat Mosley. He certainly can't hurt him or knock him out, and I can't envision him holding Mosley off by boxing, either. And just like Mayweather, Mosley isn't a draw, meaning the money wouldn't be there.

The fighter Judah should do everything in his power to try and defend the title against is Oscar De La Hoya. De La Hoya was actually being mentioned as a possible next opponent for Cory Spinks if he beat Judah and retained the title. A fight with De La Hoya would probably pay Judah more money than he has made in his entire professional career. Not only does De La Hoya represent an outrageous payday for Judah, but he brings enough baggage so that making a case for Zab is not all that farfetched.

First of all, De La Hoya hasn't been down to welterweight for over five years. And in his last two fights against Felix Sturm and Bernard Hopkins, he fought as a middleweight. The other thing Judah has going for him in a fight with De La Hoya is the style matchup. Excluding Bernard Hopkins, the fighter that fought De La Hoya best was Shane Mosley. De La Hoya was clearly bothered by Mosley's speed in both of their fights. Like Mosley, Judah has fast hands and can beat De La Hoya to the punch. If Judah can keep De La Hoya from walking him down and forcing him to trade, he could possibly win a dull fight against him.

As undisputed welterweight champ, Judah needs to make the most money he possibly can. A fight with De La Hoya is basically a win-win for Zab. The money would no doubt be there, and a loss certainly wouldn't be a career killer. De La Hoya provides Judah the chance to make the biggest payday of his career, against the fighter who he actually matches up the best against.

If Judah wants to parlay the biggest win of his career into the biggest fight of his career, his management and advisors should do everything in their power to make sure the first defense of his undisputed welterweight title is against Oscar De La Hoya.