

Big Time Running Out Of Time

Written by Joey Knish
Wednesday, 20 April 2005 21:00

Saturday night at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, heavyweight contender Jameel "Big Time" McCline finds himself in an unusual position. After years of fighting for titles and taking on top contenders, McCline finds himself in the role of gatekeeper to the division's elite as he guards his top rating and positions himself for a third major title shot, while at the same time trying to keep undefeated prospect Calvin Brock on the outside looking in.

After starting his professional fight career in 1995 and posting a 2-2-1 record, McCline has gone on to win an impressive 29 of 31 fights. The first loss came at the heavy hands of Wladimir Klitschko when he challenged for the WBO title. Then McCline found himself on the short end of a split decision loss to Chris Byrd after having dropped Byrd early in the bout. That fight in November of last year was McCline's most recent and was for the IBF heavyweight strap. In between those two defeats, "Big Time" knocked out Charles Shufford, Cedric Boswell and Wayne Llewelyn to stay in the thick of the heavyweight mix.

Standing 6'6" and tipping the scales around 270-pounds, McCline is a heavy load to handle for any opponent. Klitschko was able to wear down the New Jersey native and stop him in ten rounds, while Byrd did his best to box-and-move to gain the edge in points as McCline tired late and offered less return fire. With 34 years under his shaved head, time is against McCline as he sits on the fringes of being a top-10 heavyweight, as fighters such as his next opponent, Calvin Brock, knock on the door of opportunity.

Whether or not McCline has another title shot in his future likely depends almost entirely on this bout. A loss to Brock will drop McCline to 3-3 in his past six matches and relegate the two-time title contender to "guardian" status, while a victory would send him back to the top of the contender list and in line for another major title opportunity. Big fights and decent paydays are all that interest Jameel at this stage in his career, rather than being a measuring stick for the up-and-comers. McCline may already be just that, and Brock is knocking on the door to see how he measures up.

Calvin Brock is known as "The Boxing Banker," having worked previously for a major financial institution, and is looking to finally cash in on his perfect 24-0 record and break into the "Big Time." After beating up on the usual suspects of the division such as Marcus Rhode and Ken Murphy, Brock took a minor step up in class when he met Clifford Etienne back in January. Etienne is a serviceable heavyweight who had managed to defeat the likes of Lamon Brewster and Lawrence Clay Bey early in his career and represented Brock's toughest test to date. After knocking down Etienne in the second round and twice more in the third, the bout was stopped and it was another early night for Brock. The Charlotte, North Carolina native was impressive in overpowering Etienne and collected his 20th knockout to go with his two dozen victories.

After losing his first six amateur matches Brock stuck to his faith in himself and God to eventually make the U.S. Olympic boxing team and now finds himself set to break into the top-10 heavyweight ranking with an impressive performance on Saturday. He has sparred with

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McCline in the recent past, when "Big Time" was preparing for his title challenge against Byrd, a task that required Brock to box from a southpaw stance. Reports vary as to how those sparring sessions went, but one can draw the assumption that each fighter saw things in the other to lead them to believe they each can win.

Saturday we can expect McCline to have a 45-pound advantage over the 6' 2" Brock, who usually weighs-in around 225-pounds. While Brock has shown to be the more powerful one-punch striker, he will be at a serious disadvantage physically against a taller, stronger foe. While a fighter such as Chris Byrd had the speed and style to box-and-move against "Big Time," Brock will have to fight a perfect bout to graduate on Saturday night. The 30-year-old will have his work cut out for him in order to get inside McCline to land his heavy shots. McCline looks to be in a good position to use his 4-inch edge in height as a means to jab and one-two his way to victory.

The McCline-Brock battle is one of three interesting matches on a solid pay-per-view card being brought to us by ESPN. Shane Mosley will make his 147-pound welterweight return against 18-1 David Estrada to compliment a potentially explosive battle between welterweights Kermit "The Killer" Cintron 24-0 (22 KOs) and 31-4 (22 KOs) Antonio Margarito for the WBO crown. ESPN and Main Events have done a fantastic job of putting together a great fight card that fans can catch for just \$29.95. Unfortunately, WBA lightweight champion Juan Diaz was forced to pull out of his title defense against top-rated Ebo Elder due to a cut suffered in training.

The most intriguing bout on this big fight night may be when the big boys take to the ring. Calvin Brock is knocking on the door to get into title contention, while Jameel McCline wants to knock the luster off the undefeated Olympian in order to gain another shot at the title.

If McCline decides to fight "big" he should expose Brock as too green for the top fighters, but Jameel doesn't always fight to the stature of his 6'6" 270-pound physique. Saturday we will find out if McCline stays in line for another shot at the big time, or if it is Calvin Brock's time to shine.