

Jones-Woods II? Even If Roy Jones Wins, He Loses

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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It was March of 2003 and four-time world champion Roy Jones was at the apex of his boxing career. In his last fight he had won a lopsided 12-round unanimous decision over WBA heavyweight titleholder John Ruiz. Having already captured world titles at middleweight, super middleweight and light heavyweight, Jones made history on two fronts.

One, Jones became only the second reigning light heavyweight champ to win a heavyweight title, something only all-time great Michael Spinks accomplished (in 1985). And two, he joined Bob Fitzsimmons as the only former middleweight champions in history to win a portion of the heavyweight title, a distinction Fitz had all to himself since 1897.

During Jones' reign at 175-pounds, which lasted from November of 1996 through his last defense against Clinton Woods in September of 2002, he went 14-1 in light heavyweight title bouts. But despite being one of the most talented and skilled fighters of his generation, Jones wasn't without his critics, including myself.

Those who questioned Jones' greatness felt he dominated a sub-par light heavyweight division and weren't sold on the durability of his chin. Beating Ruiz silenced some of the critics who questioned his level of opposition. However, Ruiz only caught Jones with a few solid shots during the fight, so the questions about his chin remained largely unanswered.

Eight months after beating Ruiz, Jones vacated the WBA heavyweight title and dropped back down to the light heavyweight class. In November 2003, Jones won a majority decision over WBC light heavyweight champ Antonio Tarver to regain the title, a verdict accompanied by enough controversy that there was a public outcry for a rematch.

For the return engagement, scheduled for last May 15, Jones hired a personal fitness trainer to help him recover what he thought he had lost physically in the process of shedding the bulk he put on to challenge Ruiz. At the press conference Jones promised Tarver that he'd face the "Real Roy" this time. But after easily winning the first round, Jones was knocked out in the second by the first solid punch Tarver landed.

After their first fight, Jones cited the weight he had to drop in order to make 175 as his explanation for not beating Tarver more convincingly. For the rematch he said there'd be no excuses. When referee Jay Nady waived his hands signaling Jones out, his age (35) became an issue. Of course, there was only one problem – the fighter who KOed him was also 35.

Since Jones made his pro debut in 1989, the only fighter against whom Roy did not prove himself the better man was Antonio Tarver. The belief widely held by most observers was that Jones would clamor for a rubber match with Tarver after his devastating defeat. Instead, Jones fought newly crowned IBF light heavyweight champion Glen Johnson (40-9-2), who had two wins, two losses and two draws in his previous six fights.

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Last September 25, Johnson scored an even bigger upset than Tarver when he knocked Jones out with a single right hand 48 seconds into the ninth round. More than eight minutes elapsed before Jones made it to his feet. Once again Jones' age was cited as being the reason he lost the fight. But since Johnson and Jones were born just two weeks apart, this writer doesn't buy into that excuse.

Roy Jones hasn't officially announced whether he intends to retire or fight again; only that he "doesn't want to go out a loser." Last month former Jones foe Clinton Woods won the vacant IBF light heavyweight title. Since then reports have surfaced, most notably in Britain's Daily Mirror that Woods will make his first defense against Jones in England, something Robert Waterman (Woods co-promoter) and Brad Jacobs, who runs Jones' Square Ring Inc. with the former 4-time champ, haven't denied. Jacobs even went as far as to say, "I wouldn't write off a comeback at this point."

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that Jones sees Woods as the path of least resistance on the way to regaining the light heavyweight title for the fourth time. Jones handled Woods easily in September 2002, and undoubtedly feels a rematch against him would be a repeat of their first fight. This will ultimately bury him if he turns out to be right. Why can't Jones see that even if he beats Clinton Woods, he loses?

In my opinion Roy Jones can best preserve his damaged legacy by never fighting again. Having been counted out in his last two fights by two fighters as old as he is hasn't really damaged his legacy, but it can't be denied that it's lost some of its luster. That being said, there are still quite a few boxing observers who attribute his last two knockout defeats to Father Time and his move downward to the light heavyweight division after competing as a heavyweight. Just don't count me among them.

I believe Roy Jones has a questionable chin and don't believe for a second that it eroded overnight. Boxing history is full of fighters who endured much more punishment than Jones, and their chins never betrayed them. One thing that certainly cannot be disputed is that Tarver shattered his confidence with one left hand.

After being stopped by Tarver, Jones was tentative against Johnson and fought as if he was worried about getting knocked out. Johnson didn't have a reputation as a big puncher, yet Jones was glove-shy from the opening bell. He only let his hands go when he sensed Johnson was taking a breather. When a fighter like Jones, known for his offense, only opens up when he feels it's safe, that's a telltale sign he's more concerned about getting hit than landing against his opponent.

Last December, Johnson won a split decision over Tarver. During the 12-round fight both men hit each other with the same punches they knocked Jones out with. Not once during the fight were either Tarver or Johnson close to being hurt or in trouble. You'd think if both possessed a punch big enough to stop Roy Jones, they were at least capable of hurting each other. Is it reasonable to believe that Tarver and Johnson were only big punchers the night they fought Jones?

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Roy Jones should not fight again. Over time, his victories will overshadow the fact that he was counted out in his last two fights. Fighting Clinton Woods just to gain another title belt so he doesn't go out, in his words, "a loser," is a no-win proposition. If he looks good and wins, he can't say he was washed-up against Tarver and Johnson. And what if the worst scenario possible is realized and Woods stops him?

As of this writing it's not unreasonable to consider Jones' age the major reason he was knocked out in his last two fights. If a September fight with Woods does indeed materialize, Jones will lose even if he wins.