

For Trinidad It Happened Against Wright

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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This past Saturday night I watched the rebroadcast of the Wright-Trinidad middleweight elimination bout. For me, this fight was somewhat ironic. On December 13, 2003, Don King staged a championship tripleheader at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City. In the main event, Bernard Hopkins made the 17th consecutive defense of his middleweight title against former WBA champ William Joppy.

Prior to Hopkins-Joppy, IBF welterweight champ Cory Spinks won a majority decision over WBA/WBC champ Ricardo Mayorga to unify the welterweight title. After Spinks-Mayorga, John Ruiz fought Hasim Rahman for the vacant WBA heavyweight title. I was seated next to Felix Trinidad and his wife during this bout. Between rounds we spoke about what was happening in the ring. Halfway through the Ruiz-Rahman bout, Winky Wright grabbed a seat behind Trinidad.

As the two fighters shook hands, Winky asked Tito if the rumors about him fighting again were true. Tito nodded and said he wanted to have his first fight within six months. Winky replied, "Don't forget me. I want some of that big money." Trinidad said okay, "but it will have to be at 160." Wright acknowledged Trinidad and shook his hand again as he was leaving.

With that, I turned to Trinidad and asked him if I heard correctly. He laughed and nodded his head to confirm that I indeed heard what I thought I did. By the next morning I was getting calls and email from Hispanic and German journalists - who knew that he just watched one of his future opponents fight (Mayorga) and conversed with another future opponent (Wright) about possibly fighting down the road - trying to verify what he had said.

Here it is seventeen months later and Trinidad has announced his retirement from boxing just two fights into his comeback. Hopefully he will stay retired and reflect on what a great career he had, winning three world titles and being one of only nine welterweight champs to have won the middleweight belt.

Since Wright's lopsided decision victory over Trinidad, I'm shocked at what's not being said - especially since topics today are beaten to death. But what I thought the most telling thing about the fight hasn't even been whispered. Which leads me to believe it isn't politically correct, or those who are supposed to know don't.

Why hasn't it been said Felix Trinidad was an empty package the night he fought Winky Wright? How could any knowledgeable boxing aficionado miss it or come away with any other conclusion? You can't, not if you know what you're watching. The truth is: Trinidad hasn't been the same since being stopped by Bernard Hopkins in September of 2001. The beating Trinidad absorbed from Hopkins resembled the one that John Mugabi suffered against Marvin Hagler. Neither man ever recovered.

Before anyone goes crazy thinking I'm not giving Winky Wright his due for beating Trinidad, that's not what I'm saying. Wright won the fight, and his style would've given even a prime

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Trinidad a fit. Even at his best I'm not sure Tito gets the W against Wright. Winky is one of the last fighters I'd ever want to denigrate. He's one of boxing's good guys and I'm glad that he's starting to make some real money; he sure paid his dues.

That being said, the Felix Trinidad he dominated was a mirage in their fight. By all appearances, Tito looked like himself. It wasn't until the fight began that it became apparent that the great fighter that once was . . . was no more. Winky Wright is an outstanding fighter, but he's not quite as great as he looked winning 34 minutes out of a 36 minute fight against Trinidad. On the flip side, Trinidad, despite being a one-dimensional fighter, isn't that bad either. If Trinidad isn't a spent fighter, how did Wright handle Tito like he was fighting in his first main event? Because Trinidad is finished as a world championship level fighter.

Tito is no longer physically capable of doing what once came to him instinctively. Now he's thinking about what he has to do in the ring. That's the difference between slipping a jab and being hit repeatedly by it. When a pressure fighter has to think his way through the fight, it's over. Trinidad didn't suddenly forget how to slip and parry a jab. His reflexes were so bad that he moved his head *after* he was hit by the punch. Something I never saw him do before.

Trinidad was never that inept and vulnerable to a good jab. And I'm not buying into the theory that he was that befuddled because of Wright's southpaw stance. No way! He faced fighters like De La Hoya and Hopkins, who both possessed an outstanding jab, and he wasn't reduced to looking like a speed bag with eyes, the way he looked against Wright. Anyone who believes Trinidad is close to the fighter he was in 2001 - still capable of competing against the likes of Hopkins or Jermain Taylor, but just can't handle Winky Wright - is really reaching.

Prior to his fight against Hopkins, Trinidad beat four world champions in his last five bouts that had a combined record of 97-1-1. In fact, Trinidad looked so good in the eyes of the experts leading up to the Hopkins bout, by the night of the fight he was installed a 5-2 favorite and talk of him fighting undisputed light heavyweight champ Roy Jones was in full swing.

Trinidad had only one fight in 29 months before taking on Wright. His stoppage win over Ricardo Mayorga only revealed that he could still crack. Mayorga was a crude overrated fighter who lost his welterweight title to Cory Spinks ten months prior to facing Trinidad. Trinidad knew he had to look good in his first fight back, so he wouldn't have to fight three or four times to get back in contention. That's why Mayorga was perfect and the win over him legitimized the match with Wright.

What exactly did Winky do against Trinidad that was so great that it convinced so many fight observers that he's now unbeatable? I've seen more than a few fan polls that actually favor him over Hopkins. I think the 51 bouts before he fought Trinidad are a much better indicator as to who the real Winky Wright is. Just six months ago in his rematch with Shane Mosley, one judge wasn't convinced that he won and scored it a draw. What changed in the six months between fighting Mosley and Trinidad? We saw how Mosley looked against David Estrada this past April. So let's not say Mosley matches up better with Wright than Trinidad. It was beaten to death before both Wright-Mosley bouts that Winky was all wrong for Mosley because of styles.

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So which is it? Either Wright is great and too difficult for any fighter, or the Trinidad who showed up for their fight had nothing left. There were times during the fight when Wright would stand in front of Trinidad and do nothing, thus allowing Tito to get set – and still Tito couldn't get off. What did Wright have to do with Tito not being able to uncoil with his shots, when he did nothing to break his rhythm? Trinidad looked as if his legs weren't in synch with his body - the thinking Tito was rendered helpless - a telltale sign that a fighter's reflexes are gone. Felix's legs were shaky and his balance was awful.

How often has it been repeated that when it's over for a fighter it could happen without warning? He'll show up one night and there won't be anything left. For Felix Trinidad, it happened in his bout with Wright. In his previous outing with Mayorga, some thought he looked pretty good. However, when he showed up for his next bout, the fight with Winky Wright, there was nothing left.

This time last year, Antonio Tarver was being compared favorably to former light heavyweight great Michael Spinks (based on his knockout victory over Roy Jones in his previous fight). In his very next fight, Tarver loses to a fighter with nine loses, ending the Spinks comparison once and for all.

I hope for Winky Wright's sake that those who are now billing him as being unbeatable and think he's the favorite in a potential bout with Hopkins aren't the same people who thought Tarver was Spinks' equal this time last year.