

What world are you living in Joe Calzaghe?

Written by JE Grant

Friday, 09 September 2005 19:00

Joe Calzaghe continues to puzzle boxing fans with his odd opponent choices, all the while publicly wondering why he doesn't get enough respect, and by his equally odd comments on fellow British star Ricky Hatton.

He's not helping himself with fans by selecting an unknown opponent for his upcoming title defense, and denouncing Hatton, a fighter committed to testing his limits.

First, he is defending his WBO title against Evans Ashira. Ashira, a holder of a 24-1 (13 KOs) record, can be charitably labeled a question mark.

But of course he has been in against one marginally rated fighter, Masalino Masoe (for the WBA "regular" middleweight title), only to be pounded to the deck three times en route to a second round stoppage loss.

That was two fights ago. Since then he has beaten Quentin Smith in another middleweight bout.

And presto, according to the August WBO ratings, Ashira is number 10 at *super-middleweight*. To discover the basis for the ranking would require that we could be flies on the wall at the ratings committee meeting.

How could the conversation have gone? "Everyone in favor of promoting a fighter who has never beaten a contender, has fought one bout in the super-middleweight division (against Ruben Perez – you know him don't you?), and has not a scrap of evidence indicating he is worthy of a world-title shot." The ayes have it, he's now number 10.

(What does that suggest of the guy at number 11, Carl Froch? Froch at least has some wins in the division). Only in the imagination of the WBO and Joe Calzaghe is this a real title fight.

Secondly, Calzaghe [is now criticizing](#) Ricky Hatton for having the audacity of seeking out a new promoter in the hopes that it will lead to fights against big-name fighters. Hatton has already beaten a much better fighter in Kostya Tszyu than anyone Calzaghe has on his resume.

If Hatton is truly a free agent, history is on his side if he is basing his decision on the notion that he wants to become known as a great champion instead of a very protected belt holder. Who knows what court litigation that is sure to come from promoter Frank Warren?

Warren is [the much maligned](#), but very consistent British promoter who has proven successful in leading fighters to somewhat obscure titles – Calzaghe the WBO belt, and until recently Hatton who lugged around a WBU title, and figuring a way to keep their crowns intact.

He has consistently been able to fill European arenas for 16 Calzaghe WBO defenses and 15

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Hatton WBU defenses.

Further, getting Tszyu, who was on everyone's top pound-for-pound list, to come to England to face Hatton was no small feat. Added to that is the fact that Tszyu brought with him the true lineal 140 championship.

But why, when Hatton just faced Tszyu – ostensibly the world's top 140 pounder – and given that he is just 26 years old, would he jump the Warren ship?

For convincing evidence one needs only to examine the record of Joe Calzaghe – yes the same man who is now criticizing Hatton.

Since capturing the then-vacant WBO strap October 11, 1997 against a faded Chris Eubank, Calzaghe has faced a slew of contenders who were barely known.

His best opponents were Byron Mitchell, Charles Brewer, Robin Reid and Omar Sheika.

Mitchell lost his last fight prior to meeting Calzaghe to Sven Ottke.

Brewer lost twice to Ottke before meeting Calzaghe as well as being stopped by Antwun Echols.

Reid, a former WBC titlist, lost to a 42-year-old Thulane Malinga only two fights before facing Calzaghe. Reid's loss to Calzaghe was by a razor-thin margin by all accounts.

Sheika, with a recent loss to Markus Beyer, has now run his "title" fight record to 0-4.

It's equally instructive to list all the other opponents who faced Calzaghe in title defenses: **Bran**

ko Sobot
(who has lost 9 of his last 14 fights since facing Calzaghe); 37 year-

old Juan Carlos Gimenez (Ferreyra)

(who is 7-3-1 post-Calzaghe including no wins over ranked contenders);

Rick Thornberry

(4-2 post-Calzaghe, with losses to the ranked Anthony Mundine and titlist Sven Ottke);

David Starie

(9-2 post-Calzaghe, with a loss against Ottke);

Richie Woohall

(has not fought since their 2000 meeting);

Mario Veit (twice)

(incredibly Calzaghe knocked out Veit in the first meeting in one round in 2001 only to be required by WBO edict to face him again in 2005);

Will McIntyre

(7-1-1 post-Calzaghe but his most notable match was a draw for the Louisiana State title – you get the picture);

Miguel Angel Jimenez

(0-1 post-Calzaghe);

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Tucker Pudwill

(0-1 post-Calzaghe, his loss was to 41-year-old Vinny Paz);

Mger Mkrtchian

(3-0 post-Calzaghe including a win over Branko Sobot – see above);

Kabary Salem

(has not fought since his 2004 bout with Calzaghe; it's worthy of note that Salem lost his fight immediately preceding his bout with Calzaghe).

While it's an uninspiring list of contenders, it must be said that virtually anyone who has seen Calzaghe fight can see that he has talent. He has blazing hand speed and has risen from the canvas to win – something that even the vaunted Mike Tyson cannot claim.

One would normally look with disdain to an over-protective Warren, but in this case it appears that in Calzaghe he has a willing accomplice.

According to the BBC Calzaghe is said to have commented that with “regards to my own situation Frank is the best promoter in the world.”

Consider that during his reign the following list of fighters has hovered at or near his weight and all have somehow slipped through his fingers: Roy Jones; [Glen Johnson](#) ; Antonio Tarver; Sven Ottke; Bernard Hopkins; Markus Beyer; Eric Lucas; Bruno Girard; Clinton Woods and others.

It is almost certainly the case that some of those potential opponents were unwilling to meet Calzaghe. For his part, Calzaghe did little to push any of the name fighters into the ring. He never fought in the United States and he has done little to encourage a rallying campaign to force the hand of the rich and famous to face him.

It is difficult to fathom what riches Calzaghe would have claimed had he actively campaigned to face one of the big names of boxing. He's good looking, well-spoken, and draws well locally. He could be an international star.

Although well paid by any standard – he made more than 700,000 British pounds for his last fight – his bank account stands in stark contrast to those of his more enterprising potential foes such as Hopkins, Jones, Tarver and Johnson.

Each of them put their records and names on the line and, in the case of Tarver and Johnson, eschewed title belts only to be handsomely rewarded in hard cash. Tarver and Johnson proved that a belt can be rendered meaningless in the eyes of paying boxing fans. Calzaghe cannot legitimately hide behind WBO mandatories.

Clearly, Ricky Hatton wants a piece of the action against the top names. Apparently his 39-0 record is less important to him than proving his excellence. Calzaghe, meanwhile hugs his 39-0 record very closely.

History has proven kind to great fighters who lose occasionally. Sugar Ray Robinson lost 25

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times and he is almost universally seen as the greatest pound-for-pound fighter of all time.

Surely Calzaghe can risk it all and still be redeemed. If his scheduled bout with the hard-punching Jeff Lacy comes to fruition, he will get his chance to silence his growing legion of critics. Even if he loses while fighting well, he will gain some redemption.

Just as surely, continued defenses against questionable opponents will banish him to asterisk mention in the record books – even if he goes to 50-0.

We'll all hold our breath.