

McGirt and Tarver vs. Roy Jones

Written by Rick Folstad

Wednesday, 28 September 2005 19:00

They brought in better sparring partners to give Antonio Tarver some different looks, force him to think a little more when the punches start arriving at different angles and with different intentions.

That's because they don't know what Roy Jones Jr., (49-3, 38 KOs) will be bringing to Saturday night's light-heavyweight title fight at the St. Pete Times Forum in Tampa (HBO, pay-per-view). He could come in fast or start slow. He could dance, swagger, stalk or run. But whatever Jones brings, Tarver's trainer, Buddy McGirt, says they already have a cure for it.

"One thing we know," McGirt said on a conference call Monday. "Roy isn't going to come out there and slug with him. But we're anticipating everything and anything. And [Antonio] will be ready for whatever it is."

It's all part of the great plan to get Tarver (23-3, 18 KOs) ready for the fight of his life, and that's what this is expected to be – the fight of his life.

Tarver would be foolish to think this one will be over as quickly as the last time he fought Jones. That fight in May of last year was over in about the time it took to find a comfortable spot on your couch. It ended in the second round when Tarver landed the punch of a lifetime. Jones crumpled and Tarver took a giant step closer to becoming a household name, though he's not quite there yet. Even a win Saturday night won't guarantee him celebrity status outside the Tampa city limits. But that's just part of being a light-heavy. Unless you're like Jones, who spent almost a decade dominating the division, you don't get a lot of attention outside fight circles.

Despite his obvious power, Tarver shouldn't go into the fight expecting a repeat performance, a one-punch win.

But again, McGirt knows that. He knows you don't knock guys out by actually trying to knock them out. Knockout punches are more reflex than thought, more instinct than learned behavior.

"We're not looking for a knockout," McGirt said. "We're looking for a victory."

So he's going to make sure Tarver doesn't go into the fight trigger happy, trying to land a bomb.

Asked what they have been working on, McGirt wouldn't reveal a lot of secrets. He did say they were stressing the importance of the fight and the need to stay focused.

So how much better is Tarver now than he was, say, 15 months ago?

"Just watch the fight," McGirt said.

One thing McGirt did say about Jones is that whenever Roy throws a punch, he has a safe way

McGirt and Tarver vs. Roy Jones

Written by Rick Folstad

Wednesday, 28 September 2005 19:00

out.

“Every time he throws his right hand, he goes to his left,” McGirt said. “He always has a way out, a door open. The key is to capitalize on that. Whenever Roy makes a move, we know what direction he’s going in.”

According to McGirt, one of Tarver’s secret weapons isn’t really a secret.

“People underestimate Antonio’s hand speed,” McGirt said. “They underestimate him, period.”

Maybe that’s because they don’t really know him.

“People are starting to recognize Antonio for his talent,” McGirt said. “I always told them (he had talent), but they didn’t want to believe me. So we showed them.”

He expects Tarver to show them again on Saturday night.

“This is going to be a great fight,” he said.