

## The Super Middleweight Division and Jeff Lacy

Written by Aaron Tallent

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The super middleweight division holds one of the most exciting scenarios in boxing. Three of its four major titleholders are undefeated. Any time that is the case, highly-anticipated matchups should only be inevitable. What makes the division even more enthralling is that it has a fighter on the edge of superstardom in undefeated IBF titleholder Jeff "Left Hook" Lacy.

On paper, Lacy, who returns to the ring this Saturday night to face Scott Pemberton, has all the makings of a pay-per-view sensation. He was a 2000 Olympian, and the first of his particular class to win a championship belt. The St. Petersburg, Florida native's style is a crowd-pleasing, slugging attack, which is very effective. Of Lacy's 20 victories, only four have gone the distance.

The story of how he found boxing could one day be the stuff of folklore as well. Lacy did not choose to put on a pair of gloves. His father made him when he was seven years old for getting in trouble at school.

"I didn't decide it (going to the gym)," said Lacy. "It was a punishment. My dad sent me to the local boxing gym in St. Pete and put me in the ring with a guy I was fighting in elementary school at the time. I hated to lose anything so I stuck with it."

He turned amateur at the age of eight and had a stellar record, winning more than 200 fights. Lacy also won the 1998 U.S. Amateur Middleweight Championship, but his crowning achievement came when he represented his country in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia.

"It's (the Olympics) the elite level of being an amateur fighter," said Left Hook. "It was amazing to make it to the Olympics."

He turned professional in February of 2001. When asked about the difference between amateur and professional, there is no hesitation his answer.

"You get paid," he said, before elaborating, "It's more about who can throw the most punches in the amateurs. Professional, you get more time to seek and destroy the person."

It was a change to which Left Hook did not seem to have much trouble adjusting. Only two of his first 14 fights lasted longer than three rounds. In his 17<sup>th</sup> bout, Lacy had a title shot, and he made the most of it by stopping Syd Vanderpool in eight rounds for the IBF title.

"Making it to the Olympics is the highest stage you can reach as an amateur," said Lacy. "As far as winning the title as a professional, it is the same type of thing. Every fighter in the professional business wants to go out and capture the world title for themselves. There's nothing like it. There's nothing like being talked about as having the name 'champ' behind your name."

Since then, Lacy has been one of the hardest working champions in boxing. Saturday's bout

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with Pemberton will be his fourth defense in a little more than a year. Regardless of the winner, this fight is not likely to last twelve rounds because Pemberton, like Lacy, is more at home slugging it out.

“I think this is going to be a great fight for boxing and the public,” said Lacy. “I mean, you got two guys that’s punchers. You got two guys that’s been ducked for a long time, and you got two guys that’s going to come to battle next Saturday night. And the best man’s gonna win.”

If he defeats Pemberton, Lacy will then assess his future as a super middleweight.

It is a division with very talented champions. Both WBA champ Mikkel Kessler and WBO titleholder Joe Calzaghe are undefeated. However, those fighters, along with WBC champ Markus Beyer, are all on the opposite side of the Atlantic Ocean. Needless to say, setting up a fight has been difficult.

“If I’m not able to unify the title, that’s something which I would love to do in the super middleweight division,” said Lacy. “But being that it has been difficult with trying to get the other champions in the ring, it might be something that we might not be able to do. It’s a little bit harder than what I expected. I thought everybody wanted to fight.”

One thing is for certain. He will not go to Europe to face Calzaghe.

“I’m not going there,” said Lacy. “He (Calzaghe) should’ve came here. He’s coming here now. I’m not going there.”

If a fight with Calzaghe, Kessler or Beyer does not materialize, Left Hook will look at adding a few pounds, or dropping a few.

“I’ll either take a look at light heavyweight or move down to 160 and challenge the champions at that weight class,” said Lacy.

If there is a time for Left Hook to maximize his drawing potential, he knows the time is now.

“I think there’s a lot of attention to the middleweight division nowadays,” he said. “There’s nothing in the heavyweight division. I think everything’s moved down to the middleweight division. I think that’s where all the talk is about.”