

Gary Shaw on Lacy Stunner: "Losing Sucks"

Written by Michael Woods

Wednesday, 08 March 2006 19:00

Promoter Gary Shaw sat in his chair at the MEN Arena with high hopes dancing in his head. Shaw loved Jeff Lacy's chances against Joe Calzaghe last Saturday night, and beyond that, he loves Jeff Lacy.

His son Jared has spent tons of time with the 28-year-old Floridian and idolizes the fighter with fierce intensity.

So by round three, when it became apparent that Lacy wasn't making the switches he needed to make to get into the bout with Calzaghe, Shaw began to feel sick. His stomach churned, the tension at seeing the unbelievable unfold before his disbelieving eyes doing a nasty job on his innards.

"I was wishing I could be in there with him," said the promoter. "It was tough for my wife sitting by me. My son was hysterical in California. Losing sucks, period."

So, was Lacy overanxious? Did the magnitude of the moment dwarf? What the hell happened?

"I don't know," Shaw said. "Lacy told me afterwards, 'That wasn't Jeff Lacy in that ring.'"

By the third round, Shaw said, he saw this Lacy was a poor shadow of the Lacy that had rung up 21 straight wins as a pro: "I knew then he was fighting on sheer will. I knew he was just hoping to land a haymaker."

Shaw gave his lungs a workout, pleading with Lacy to step it up. "Show heart!" he bellowed. "Fight from your heart!"

Towards the finish in the twelfth, Shaw said, he wanted to throw in the towel as his man was taking shot after shot and wasn't answering. But the bell rang.

Jim Wilkes, the attorney/advisor/friend of Lacy approached Shaw around the ninth round and said he wanted to tell trainer Dan Birmingham to halt the one-sided affair. Shaw talked him out of it.

"He loves Jeff, but I said 'Don't do that. Lacy has a punchers chance and maybe he'll always hate us for doing that.'"

So, I asked Shaw, was Lacy exposed?

"I don't know if he got exposed," he said. "But his curve didn't curve, his fastball wasn't fast and his slider didn't slide."

Shaw offered analogies to other sports figures that on one occasion just didn't have the goods.

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“The best example is Sugar Ray Leonard,” he said. “He lost to Duran, then had a sparkling career. Or maybe Nolan Ryan. One day he goes out and he doesn’t have his best stuff and he’s pulled in the third inning. But you can’t pull a fighter.”

Does Shaw regret making the match?

“Not at all,” he said. “Things broke down and they went wrong. But I haven’t sat down with Jeff one on one and asked ‘Was it the moment?’ Or ‘Was it the buildup?’”

Shaw recommended to Lacy that he take a long break from boxing. The fighter was taking an MRI and a CT scan on Wednesday, the promoter said, to make sure there was no severe trauma, beyond the blow to his reputation and, perhaps, confidence. “He should forget all about boxing for awhile,” Shaw said.

It could be as late as October, Shaw said, before Lacy laces the gloves on again.

The promoter was jetting to Thailand on some business. He’d scheduled a vacation right after the big bout, and will adhere to his plans. But his tour won’t be a victory lap. “It’s bittersweet,” Shaw said. “It’s not that easy to shrug it off. He’s special to me.”

MEA CULPA, LATIN FOR “MY BAD”

Tons of UK readers have called for it, and while that outcry does indeed influence me, my conscience demands it. So here it goes, my massive mea culpa on the Lacy KO 2 prediction.

I got it wrong.

I blundered.

Is that enough, my UK detractors, my wealth of Wales-residing anti-fanclub devotees?

No?

Well tough luck, because many of your “experts” across the pond there said many of the same things I did about Calzaghe’s checkered past. They referenced the poor performances, the pullouts, and the apparent hesitance to demand marquee matchups with the best and brightest in the sport.

They were, like me, skillfully seduced by the grapefruits posing as biceps that are attached to Jeff Lacy.

The sweet nothings whispered in their ears, about the Olympian’s unparalleled determination and wrecking-ball power, worked like Cialis. The sweet nothings clouded their brains and gave them a serious hard-on for Lacy, who in retrospect, after the blood has flooded back into our brains, we realized hasn’t fought any competitor anywhere close to the caliber of boxing’s King of Wales.

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But I should have paid more attention to the fighters who looked into their crystal balls and saw Calzaghe, despite his advanced age, and balsa-wood hands, and his hymen-thin chin, emerging with his undefeated record intact.

In that vein, was there any person more qualified to hazard a guess who would leave the MEN Arena on Saturday night still undefeated than Robin Reid? The British super-middleweight, a quite competent pro, fought both of them. He met Calzaghe in 1999 and lost a split decision. In August, with 35 years under his belt, he had his last stand against the ascendant Lacy. The Floridian took a conclusive TKO8 win.

After that bout, Reid, who had never hit the canvas prior to being felled by Lacy, said that in a clash of Calzaghe/Lacy, he'd lean towards the Welshman. "'Left Hook Lacy is overrated," Reid said. "He's strong and he's good but not as good as you think. I could tell you that he's the greatest thing since sliced bread since he's just beaten me – but he's not."

And Marvin Hagler, an officer in the Lefty Club, saw great things in Calzaghe, then a junior officer in the Club. As across-the-pond reader Mark Oxley kindly pointed out to me, the Marvelous One has gushed about Calzaghe, putting him in the pound-for-pound top ten. Hagler also said Calzaghe would give Lacy some schooling and come out on top March 4.

So what's the lesson learned, from my perspective? Ask more ACTUAL FIGHTERS their take on the matchups that intrigue us, instead of relying on experts who haven't left their sweat and blood on the canvas.

SPEEDBAG

Mikkel Kessler (37-0), the WBA super middle champ, was ringside with promoter Mogens Palle and advisor Michael Marley. Marley then watched the bout on tape and said it looked more scintillating in person. So, will Calzaghe give Kessler, the undefeated Dane, next crack?

"I talked to Frank Warren on another matter, and I think Calzaghe's shooting for Roy Jones," Marley said.

Kessler, whose last fight was a TKO10 win over Eric Lucas in January, showed off his predictive skills before Calzaghe and Lacy squared off. "Kessler told me Calzaghe would win," Marley said. "But he didn't say it would be that easy."

Marley was severely unimpressed with Lacy's defense and had no regard for his team's reaction after the shocking loss. "They sandbagged him," Marley said. "They said he didn't he didn't follow the gameplan. Lacy needed support then. He'll recover physically, he's young, but I don't know about mentally."

* * *

After I filed my Calzaghe/Lacy fight report, I realized something. I had neglected to mention what title belts were on the line.

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Know something? No one noticed, or cared enough to alert me to the omission.

I believe my "error" was a subconscious act, and indicates my disdain for the whole idiotic Billion And One Belts scenario that exists today. Real fans know who the best fighters are, and they spread the word to the less-hardcore who may be swayed by sanctioning body sweet-talk. The belts are less and less relevant.

* * *

If you're in the tri-state area, stop by the Hammerstein Ballroom on Thursday evening and see a welterweight who will likely be in the big picture title mix sooner rather than later. Edgar Santana (16-2, 11 KOs) was born in Puerto Rico and lives in Spanish Harlem. (He's managed by Ernesto Dallas, who I met at a PR event, and impressed the heck out of me. He came off smart and humble, and when I learned that he haggled with promoter Lou DiBella to get a solid contract, I marked him down as one to watch. Word will spread that he's a manager who's willing to battle long and hard for the betterment of his fighter.) Santana faces off with 19-5-1 Francisco Campos, who has lost to some excellent fighters but who the matchmaker, Joe Quiambao, assures me can really crack.

Also, Gary Stark, a 13-0 super bantam from Staten Island, is in tough. He's matched with 20-4 Debind Thapa, a southpaw from Nepal.

Tix are available by calling 212-947-2577.