

R-E-S-P-E-C-T James “Lights Out” Toney

Written by Rick Folstad

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The thing about James Toney is, he talks a good fight, then turns around and delivers one. He's like the schoolyard bully who struts around the playground puffing out his chest and bragging about how bad he is.

You figure he's all talk until he fattens your lip.

Along with being a tough guy, Toney also might be the best heavyweight out there. At least he thinks he is.

“What have I got to do to prove to you that I'm the best fighter in the world, period?” he asked on a recent conference call promoting Saturday night's heavyweight title fight against Hasim Rahman in Atlantic City (HBO). “After (Saturday), I want every boxing writer on their hands and knees to kiss my feet before I even talk to you all.”

Funny guy.

His fight with Rahman (41-5-1, 33 KOs) should hold plenty of drama. They don't like each other, and that's usually worth a few anecdotes.

A few months ago at a birthday bash in Mexico, Rahman claimed Toney pushed him as he was walking by, so Rahman slapped Toney across the face, saying Toney was then restrained from getting to Rahman by “one finger.”

Toney (69-4-2, 43 KOs) remembers the incident a little differently.

“When I came down in the elevator to meet the press, he got mad because he didn't have any attention,” Toney said. “So he came in and said ‘the champ is here,’ and pushed me out of the way. Then things got out of hand on his behalf. People were holding me. Nobody was holding him. He scratched me like a little woman. He ain't fast enough to hit me. He scratched me on the lip just like a little b----.”

The truth is probably somewhere near the middle.

Regardless of their little spat, the winner of this fight takes home both the WBC belt (which presently belongs to Rahman), and the right to call himself one of the two or three best heavyweights in the world, though both Rahman and Toney will tell you they already are the two best in the world. And it's hard to argue with them. Rahman and Toney have always been ready to fight the best heavyweights out there, and that willingness alone puts them in a class of their own.

“Look at the fighters today,” Toney said when asked what's happened to the fallen heavyweight division. “They don't want to fight nobody.”

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Toney's promoter, Dan Goossen, took it even further.

"I believe you guys (the media) are going to see one of the best heavyweights that has ever fought in heavyweight history," Goossen said. "I truly believe that because James Toney is real."

At 5-foot-9, he's also kind of short for a heavyweight, though Mike Tyson was short and he did pretty well for himself.

"I love beating bigger heavyweights up," Toney said. "I feel like I'm walking through a buffet."

Buffet? Interesting analogy. Toney looks like a guy who would rather eat than, say, breathe. By fight night, he could weigh anywhere from 245 pounds to "bring in the truck scale, guys."

"I never trained for a fight," Toney said at a pre-fight press conference Tuesday. "I trained to lose weight."

Finally, Toney had to remind everyone that he's still the forgotten man in the fight game.

"Give me my respect," he said. "You don't give it to me, I'm going to take it. And if I do take it, I'm going to spit it right back in your face. You won't like that."

Asked why he feels he doesn't get any respect, Toney said it was because he doesn't kiss butt.

"And I'm very outspoken," he said. "I speak the truth."

Which is one of the reasons he gets respect.

"Everybody needs a flashy, boisterous heavyweight champ like myself, and that's what I'm bringing," Toney said. "I got a promoter with me along with a freaky-ass trainer (Freddie Roach) and a helluva strength coach."

And some of the best one-liners since Muhammad Ali.