

Exclusive Interview with Joe Calzaghe

Written by Luca De Franco
Monday, 08 May 2006 19:00

After his annihilation of Jeff Lacy, everybody knows Joe Calzaghe. Magazines, newspapers and websites even put him in their pound-for-pound rankings. This shows how important promotion is in making a boxer world-famous. There so many fighters who couldn't clean Calzaghe's shoes yet are hyped as being special, while Joe held the WBO super middleweight title for eight years and still most people believed that he wasn't in the same class as Jeff Lacy. Like real champions do, Joe shut them all up with a superb performance dominating Jeff Lacy for twelve rounds.

Looking at the boxers' records it should have been easy to predict Joe as the winner: he won the vacant WBO title scoring a unanimous decision over Chris Eubank and defended it 17 times defeating respected opponents like Robin Reid (on points), Omar Sheika (TKO 5), Richie Woodhall (TKO 10), Mario Veit (TKO 1 and TKO 6), Charles Brewer (on points), Tocker Pudwill (TKO 2) and many others. On the other hand, Jeff Lacy had been IBF champion for just one year and five months and had only five title matches in his record against Syd Vanderpool (TKO8), Omar Sheika (on points), Rubin Williams (TKO 7), Robin Reid (TKO 8) and Scott Pemberton (KO 2). Then, why Jeff Lacy was the overwhelming favorite against Joe Calzaghe?

My theory is that Lacy had more exposure in the American media and that's what everyone sees on the other continents. If a boxer is famous in the United States, he is known in the rest of the world.

Joe Calzaghe spent his entire career fighting in Great Britain, Denmark and Germany, but being famous in Europe doesn't mean that you are also known in America or Asia. Anyway, if a boxer wins major fights he must be respected and Joe Calzaghe always won by dominating his opponents. As the master class he put on against Jeff Lacy proved, Joe Calzaghe can throw wonderful combinations and never slow the rhythm. His opponents cannot understand what punch knocked them down, because Joe hits them from continuously every angle. Many times, Calzaghe's opponents looked bad because he made them look bad.

Mario Viet was one the biggest stars in Germany and was undefeated in 30 fights, but he didn't last one round against *The Pride of Wales*. When the rematch took place, Viet had improved his record to 45-1 and many experts gave him a chance to win: he lost in six rounds. Same story for Omar Sheika who got hyped even by *The Ring* magazine. He was 20-1 and considered a future champion, but was stopped in five rounds by *The Italian Dragon*

. This nickname comes from Calzaghe's father Enzo who was born on the island of Sardinia. Joe considers himself British, but doesn't forget his roots and proudly claims to be a fan of the Italian national soccer team. Among clubs, he likes Juventus of Turin (Hey Joe, that's really a classy choice. I'm a fan of Juventus too). Enzo Calzaghe still has close ties with Italy, reads our newspapers and was more than happy when I called to ask for an interview with Joe.

While on the phone, he called his son telling him: "*Come here, this is very important: an Italian*

Exclusive Interview with Joe Calzaghe

Written by Luca De Franco
Monday, 08 May 2006 19:00

journalist wants to talk with you.”

Joe gave

me his cell phone number and told me to call him the following day.

Joe, compliments for your great performance against Jeff Lacy. He should have been your toughest opponent, but he turned out to be easy. Who gave you a hard time?

Chris Eubank. It was my first world title fight and I was nervous. On the other hand, Chris had been WBO middleweight and super middleweight champion. He had fought 20 WBO title matches with a record of 17 wins, 1 loss and 2 draws. He was used to twelve rounds battles, while I never had gone past 8 rounds (KOing all my opponents but one). To everybody's surprise, I knocked Chris down after 20 seconds (with a left hook) and realized that I could win. After the third round, I started tiring and had to do my best to keep a decent rhythm. I understood that I was living my dream and found the energy to outclass him getting a unanimous decision: 116-111, 118-110 and 118-109.

Many people were also surprised by the way you destroyed Mario Veit in only one round.

They considered him great because he was undefeated, but he had been untested. I jumped on him from the opening bell, knocking him down and out. After having faced and beaten him twice, I can say that Mario Veit is a good fighter.

The only split decision in your record is the fight against Robin Reid. Was he that tough?

No, he wasn't. I must admit that my performance was very poor, because I hurt my hand early in the fight. Anyway, I dominated him and should have gotten a unanimous decision. Just look at the scorecards: two judges had it 116-111 in my favor, while the third official scored it 116-111 for him. How can you explain such a difference? My theory is that Robin Reid is English and we were fighting in England. Even if I was born there, I always lived in Wales and that time I played the role of the foreign fighter.

Would you like to unify the titles?

Sure, I would like to become the undisputed super middleweight champion of the world.

What do you think about WBC champion Markus Beyer?

He is a good fighter, but I'm pretty sure to knock him out.

And about WBA champion Mikkel Kessler?

Probably, he is the most skilled super middleweight in the world. I'm sure to beat him too. Mikkel's problem is that he is not very famous and I'm looking for a big name to get a big purse.

Since you draw 20,000 paying customers in Manchester and maybe even more in Wales, it

Exclusive Interview with Joe Calzaghe

Written by Luca De Franco
Monday, 08 May 2006 19:00

doesn't make much sense fighting abroad. Would you consider it?

Of course, if the money is right. My priority is getting the biggest purse possible. I would like to fight in the United States and in Italy.

What about former WBC champion Cristian Sanavia?

I never saw him in action, so I cannot express a judgement. My father tells me that he is a good fighter and would also be a good opponent.

In your division the champions are from Europe, do you think that is just a coincidence?

No, I believe that boxing is on the verge of a major change. Just look at the heavyweight division: three champions are Europeans. Who could have imagined that, only a few years ago?

Joe Calzaghe

Born in London (England) on February 23, 1972

Hometown: Newbridge (Wales)

Nicknames: Pride of Wales and Italian Dragon

Stance: Southpaw

Trainer: Enzo Calzaghe (his father)

Manager: Frank Warren

Amateur Titles:

British welterweight champion in 1991

British light middleweight champion in 1992

British middleweight champion in 1993

Professional Career:

Record: 41 wins (31 KOs) in 41 matches

British super middleweight champion in 1995-1996

WBO world super middleweight champion since October 11, 1997

Defeated Chris Eubank on points to claim the vacant crown

Defended the belt 18 times

Prizes:

Voted Young Boxer of the Year in 1995 by the Professional Boxing Association and Boxing Writers' Club