

Greene and Thompson Win In Long Island

Written by Mitch Abramson
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Jason Thompson, a junior middleweight from Brooklyn, was celebrating a solid victory at the Huntington Townhouse last Thursday when he was interrupted by a familiar voice.

“I can’t believe they stopped the fight,” someone whaled. “How could they stop it? Why did they stop it? Damn It!”

A winner by third round TKO, Thompson spun around and spotted Ron Lewis, his knockout victim, droning on about the end of the bout: “They took it from me. They took it from me. They shouldn’t have stopped it!” Lewis continued.

Thompson, 25, slowed down to watch Lewis’ temper tantrum and then disappeared to his dressing room with his friend Cesar Murillo and trainer Rogelio Jackson.

The last time Thompson fought at the Huntington Townhouse in Long Island on a Ring Promotions and Frankie “G” Productions show on September 15, the post-fight scene was a little more chaotic.

In his professional debut, Thompson artfully knocked out Mike Ruiz with a left hook that prompted the ringside physician to stop the bout.

Euphoric over his win, Thompson went over to embrace Ruiz and Ruiz threw a punch, setting off a short melee in the ring. Minutes later, prompted by his trainer, Ruiz meekly apologized to Thompson for the late blow.

Three months later, on the heels of that memorable debut, Thompson trekked to Philadelphia for his second fight, and he was caught by another punch he wasn’t expecting, this time from Mike Jones, a highly touted prospect from Philly.

Billed as an average fighter with limited potential to Thompson’s advisor, Pete Brodsky, the bout was made and Thompson was caught with a left hook he didn’t see from a fighter he had underestimated. He was knocked out in the second round, his record dropped to 1-1, and his short career took a dramatic turn for the worse.

The description of what happened against Jones, narrated by Thompson, is stunning.

“I had never been hit like that before,” he said. “I saw a bright light [after he hit me] and I stumbled into the ropes. He realized I was hurt, and he hurt me as I was moving back. In my mind, I was up and still fighting, but I was really on the floor. When I saw my trainer walk into the ring, I realized that I was on the canvas. I was there for like 20 seconds and the fight was over. I couldn’t believe it. Every fighter goes through this; it’s a setback but in the end it makes you work even harder. It was just a case of bad matchmaking. I’ll fight that guy again.”

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The best therapy for a knockout loss is to get back into the gym, and three months after getting rocked by Jones, Thompson, from Flatbush, Brooklyn, was in training camp with Luis Collazo for his May 13 clash with Ricky Hatton, which Collazo narrowly lost by unanimous decision. Matching wits with Collazo and Randy Griffin, a top rated middleweight from Philadelphia helped revive his spirits, and he was looking forward to the bout with Lewis, who was 0-3 but was taller (at 5-foot-11) and fighting at his natural weight, junior middleweight, whereas Thompson is a natural welterweight.

“I was ready to get back in the ring,” Thompson said. “It was like a new beginning after what happened before.”

The undefeated super middleweight from Brooklyn, Joe Greene, who once defeated Thompson in the amateurs, was the headliner of the show, but Thompson as the opening act may have stolen the show with his performance.

When a fighter is brutally knocked out, the damage is not just physical. A fighter like Michael Grant was never the same psychologically after his vicious knockout at the hands of heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis in 2000. Grant has not fought since June of last year and he has looked timid in his other bouts. After Felix Trinidad stopped him in the 12th round, Fernando Vargas was never the same. Both Vargas and Grant went from instinctive, relaxed fighters to ones filled with doubt after their dramatic losses. Fortunately for Thompson, a tough, slick fighter, his knockout loss was relatively quick, and the harm done to his psyche appeared minimal.

Although he was a bit tentative in the first round against Lewis, Thompson would eventually loosen up and his punches began to flow with their usual frequency. Thompson was jabbing to Lewis' body at the outset, but he quickly changed course and began digging shots to the body when Lewis started countering the jab. Lewis complained of a low blow in the second round of the scheduled four round bout, and he complained again to referee Patrick Sullivan in the third after the bout was stopped at 2:15 of the round; perhaps feeling the repercussions of seeing his record dip to 0-4, he complained afterward as well.

“He was breathing heavily in the first round,” Lewis said of Thompson. “I wanted to go after him, but I had instructions to be patient and take my time because he was a puncher. But I could see he was tired, and that's when I should have gone after him. I feel like I wasted an opportunity in this fight.”

What's certain was the series of punches that Thompson landed in the third round, beginning with a thudding right uppercut to the body that caused Lewis to spuriously shake his body, mocking the effect of the punch. Always a good finisher, Thompson ran in and landed an overhand right to the top of Lewis' head that pushed him back to the ropes; Thompson then landed around 15 straight punches, prompting Sullivan to stop the bout. His arms outstretched in an operatic pose, Lewis ran around the ring protesting the stoppage, but the result was justified, and Thompson, who never warmed up for the bout because he arrived late for the match, the first of the show, left the ring with a comeback victory.

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“It feels good coming in here and getting the win,” Thompson said. “I was in shape, and I was more focused than I was for the last fight. I was ready; I’d been working so hard in training camp, sparring with Collazo and Griffin, so I wasn’t really worried or nervous about this fight. I knew I was ready.”

In the main event, Joe Greene won a unanimous decision against 37-year-old Derrick Graham, who hadn’t performed in almost six years. Graham fought Winky Wright (KO 3) and Alex Bunema (decision loss) in a patchy career that also saw him beat dangerous Levan Easley and undefeated Emil Baku early on.

A former amateur star from the Starrett City Boxing Club, Greene, 20, won by three scores of 80-71, improving his record to 10-0 (7 KO’s) and going eight rounds for the first time in his career.

Greene is built like an eighteen-wheeler, but he is also nimble on his feet and busy with his punches. Although his punch output has never been tallied by CompuBox, Greene would surely keep the workers busy with his work-rate. When he realized that he couldn’t knock Graham out after the fourth round, Greene altered his approach, picking and choosing his shots more carefully, which also helped him conserve energy against the tricky Graham, who positioned himself like a batter crowding the plate trying to shrink the strike zone as he stooped over with his hands up, giving Greene a very narrow target to work with. Still, Greene managed to knock Graham down in the sixth round with a straight left, and he landed enough clean punches to clearly win the bout.

“I felt good,” Greene said. “I displayed my boxing skills and going the distance gave me the opportunity to try out new things. I never got frustrated, and I kept on working. Midway through the fight, I saw that loading up on the big punches wasn’t working, so I began putting 4-5 shots together to win the rounds. It was a good experience.”

Consumed with his work as a court stenographer at Newark Municipal Court, Graham was lured out of semi-retirement by an injury to his brother, Eric, who was supposed to fight Greene but withdrew. Having went the distance after a long layoff, Graham was in good spirits after the match, complimenting Greene’s performance and smiling with reporters. The next show at the Huntington Townhouse is scheduled for September 14 and Greene is penciled in.

“He has real good power and you can tell that he will only get better,” said Graham, who dropped to 12-8-1 (4 KOs). “I’m a real good defensive fighter, and I know how to block punches. Because of the ring rust, I wasn’t able to get off like I wanted to. I could see where I wanted to punch, but I just couldn’t pull the trigger. Joe Greene has the potential to be a very good fighter. I think he has to get a little craftier so he can set his shots up better, but I can see that he has the talent to do that.”