

Checking In With Roy Jones, Hanshaw, Hopkins

Written by David A. Avila
Wednesday, 13 June 2007 19:00

LOS ANGELES-When the call came that Roy Jones Jr. and Anthony Hanshaw were meeting boxing writers and other media in Los Angeles to promote their upcoming fight, it was time to jump in my car and ignore the 100-degree heat that was descending on the Southern California landscape.

Jones was arriving that very Tuesday afternoon at LAX to meet the media at the offices of the LA Sentinel, the largest Black newspaper in the state. Another good reason for me to go is a great friend of mine grew up right around the corner from that location on Crenshaw Blvd. and Coliseum Avenue.

I had two good reasons and later discovered a third.

Inside the LA Sentinel the staff was busy doing their work as boxing writers waited for Jones to arrive. The Floridian had been told the press conference was set for 3 p.m., but we were told it was at noon.

A table-full of delicious food was set up by the Sentinel so waiting was a pleasure. About 1:30 Jones walked into the room looking ready for a high-powered business meeting. The former Pound for Pound champion wore a gray pinstripe suit and looked ready for negotiations.

In a way Jones is negotiating for this upcoming battle against Hanshaw who arrived early and waited too.

“He’s scared,” said Hanshaw about Jones a half hour earlier.

Murad Muhammad is co-promoting the fight along with Jones’s Square Ring Promotions for July 14 at Biloxi, Miss. Jones will meet Hanshaw in a 12-round light heavyweight limit at the Mississippi Coast Coliseum and Convention Center.

Hanshaw does not hold back.

“I’m going to be the guy that retires Roy Jones,” said Hanshaw (21-0-1, 14 KOs), who usually boxes in the super middleweight division and trains in Las Vegas.

Don’t expect Hanshaw to hold back the hammer when he confronts the legendary Jones. The Ohio native is a great guy out of the ring, but within the ropes the “Tyger” has a mean streak as wide as the Tuscarawas River that runs alongside his town Massillon famous for high school football.

“You all don’t know me, but on July 14 you will know me,” said Hanshaw menacingly while looking at Jones who sat calmly to his right. “After July 14 you will have a retirement party.”

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Jones sat through most of the conversations calm and reserved until it was his time to speak. He nearly jumped to his feet.

“My name is Roy Jones Jr. who ducks nobody,” said Jones in his cool but quick manner. “You want me, come get me. I’m right here.”

Jones last win against Prince Badi Ajamu was not taken seriously by most of America and especially the boxing media. Though he won the fight decisively, it was expected that the Pensacola flash win by nothing short of a spectacular knockout. It didn’t occur.

Not that Ajamu isn’t a credible fighter, but he’s not in that same special category that Jones once reigned over.

But it was the former heavyweight, light heavyweight, super middleweight and middleweight champions first win in three years. Who would imagine ever saying those words after witnessing Jones incredible display of boxing talent and athleticism against Julio Gonzalez in 2001.

Jones knows what happened.

“Now I have everyone where I want them. There are doubters,” said Jones. “Now I got to prove a point.”

Next

Outside the LA Sentinel offices one of the regulars at Wild Card Boxing Club was in attendance and said Bernard Hopkins was working out.

A few of us jumped in our car and headed north on Crenshaw Blvd. a few miles up to Hollywood.

There was Hopkins and his team of bodyguards, trainers and friends who travel with him wherever he goes. The Philadelphia fighter had barely arrived and already looked like he was ready for a 12-round war.

“Look at his footwork,” said Macka Foley, one of the boxing trainers. “That’s amazing.”

Hopkins worked inside the ring with John David Jackson a former middleweight champion and more importantly a southpaw. Perfect pairing when the next opponent is southpaw stylist Winky Wright.

Also working with Hopkins is Freddie Roach who knows a thing or two about southpaws like Manny Pacquiao, Bobby Pacquiao and AJ Banal.

“We’re just starting out,” says Roach.

Hopkins has a no nonsense attitude inside the gym and races through his routines with little chit

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chat.

Finally he's finished.

When asked if he plans to spar with Roy Jones Jr. who is a few miles down the street he laughs.

"No, never sparring, but we can fight," Hopkins said.

Wednesday traffic

On Wednesday morning through blistering traffic and blistering heat we arrived at the La Habra Boxing Club in Orange County to meet with Alfonso Gomez who has a scheduled fight against future Hall of Famer Arturo Gatti. The fight takes place in Atlantic City on July 14 and will be shown on HBO.

Inside the cool gym Gomez is warming up for his routine as we walk inside. Also in the boxing gym located in a dead end street near some railroad tracks is trainer David Martinez. He's working with female boxing contender Julie Rubalcava who is preparing to knock some of the rust off. She fought in New Mexico recently against Monica Lovato and lost in that fighter's hometown. It was their second confrontation. Rubalcava won their first meeting.

"I got so tired up there," said Rubalcava, citing the high elevation the fight took place. "I couldn't breathe."

Martinez is now training the petite fighter who will fight at the 112-pound flyweight division.

"She knows a lot already," Martinez said, who also trains another female fighter named Nadja Ropac.

Two hours later Gomez finally finishes up his work and talks about his upcoming showdown with Gatti. You can see the excitement in his eyes though he hides it with his cool sobering demeanor.

Within 10 minutes all pretense is gone.

"This is my big opportunity," said Gomez whose participation in the Contender reality TV series brought him sudden fame worldwide.

Recently Gomez fought in a fight card featuring USA fighters from the Contender vs. Contenders from the United Kingdom. Gomez knocked out his opponent but more importantly, he was cheered from his entrance to his knockout victory.

"I was really surprised by their cheers," said Gomez, undeniably the most popular boxer from any of the Contender shows. "I was real happy."

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After talking to Gomez for an hour it's easy to see he's a renaissance man. There's more to Gomez than his brawling all-action style. But we'll save that for another day soon.

From La Habra it's about 45 minutes from South El Monte where Antonio Margarito is preparing for his big fight against Big Paul Williams.

For the first time in 2007 the gym is really hot as summer finally arrives to Southern California. Sure it's usually 80 degrees in April, but in June the 90 degree temperatures hit Los Angeles and increase to 110 degrees in Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

Margarito is working hard on body punches with his trainer Javier Capetillo. Also in the gym is Maxboxing writer Steve Kim who's scouting Margarito too.

It's too late for sparring but Rodney Jones and another tall fighter named Austin Trout have been giving Margarito a Williams-like look.

The Tijuana boxer goes through his drills with that same passion whether he's fighting Joshua Clottey or Shotgun Gomez. He looks more focused than usual and I guess that has to do with Williams.

Around 3:30 p.m. we leave South El Monte and head into Boyle Heights where Wendy Rodriguez is preparing for her big fight against Germany's Regina Halmich. The fight is scheduled for July 28 in Dusseldorf, Germany.

Rodriguez, the IBA light flyweight titleholder, moves up to the 112-pound division to see if she can be the first American fighter to topple the great Halmich.

It's no easy task.

"I know she's a good fighter. I'm going to do my best," said Rodriguez, who lives in South Central L.A. "I'm pretty excited about this fight."

We eat at Al & Bees Burrito stand across the street from the same gym that was home to Olympic gold medal winners Paul Gonzalez and Oscar De La Hoya for a short while.

Malignaggi vs. N'Dou

New York's Paul Malignaggi (22-1, 5 KOs) meets Australia's Lovemore N'Dou (45-8-1, 30 KOs) for the vacant IBF junior welterweight title on Saturday June 16 at the Mohegan Sun Casino in Connecticut.

N'Dou doesn't have much luck fighting outside of Australia. In four fights inside the U.S. he's lost five out of seven times. Now he's facing the speedy Malignaggi whose 26-year-old legs may be too quick for the hard-hitting N'Dou.

The fight will be shown on HBO on Saturday.

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Malignaggi's loss to Miguel Cotto last year looks better and better. The fleet-footed New Yorker lasted all 12 rounds against the wrecking ball Cotto. He's the only fighter to go the distance since N'Dou in 2004. That's a coincidence.

Tyrone Harris at Harrah's Rincon on Friday

Lightweight contender Tyrone Harris (19-3, 13 KOs) meets Pascali Adorno (10-5, at Harrah's Rincon on Friday June 15.

Harris and Adorno are both southpaws so it should be an interesting match up.

Also on the card will be San Jacinto's Ron Hurley against Fresno's Jerry Mondragon in a featherweight contest. For more information call (877) 777-2457.

Santiago Perez in El Monte Card

Welterweight hopeful Santiago Perez will be the headlining fighter at Florentine Gardens in El Monte on Friday June 15. The event is promoted by One Tough Cookie Promotions.

Perez is the son of Sugar Ramos, the former featherweight great who fought out of Mexico after leaving Cuba in the early 1960s.

For more information call (760) 904-6134.