

Jones Jr. Fighting For The South, Old Glory

Written by David A. Avila
Sunday, 24 June 2007 19:00

In the Deep South, Roy Jones Jr., a native Floridian, ranks among the greatest heroes for that slice of America rivaling any NASCAR driver, football star or Confederate hero.

Can you say Mississippi?

Jones (50-4, 38 KOs) returns to his southern roots once again to prove his talent has not slipped like an old shoe without shoelaces. Looking to trip up the former Pound for Pound star will be Ohio's Anthony Hanshaw when they meet at Mississippi Coast Coliseum on July 14. The fight will be available on pay-per-view.

"He's scared," said Hanshaw (21-0-1, 14 KOs), who usually fights a division lower in the 168-pound super middleweight division.

Who can blame Jones for attempting to recapture the glory he held tightly like a birthright. From 1988 when he beat Ricky Randall in front of his Pensacola hometown to 2002 when he grabbed an easy decision over Clinton Woods, the Jones machine rolled like a well-oiled limousine.

Everybody was in it for the ride.

But returning back to the light heavyweight division after bulking up with heavier muscle to fight and beat WBA heavyweight champion John Ruiz, took a toll like an anvil.

"It was a mistake," said Jones, 38, who lost 25 pounds of solid muscle used to become only the second man in boxing history to win a middleweight and heavyweight title and move back to a lower weight. He fought Tarver twice and was knocked out cold in the second meeting in May 2004. The legs that had carried him to 49 electrifying wins seemed stuck in mud.

Those legs had propelled him to recognition as the best fighter in the world without a peer. Against Tarver, Glen Johnson and an almost unknown opponent named Prince Badi Ajamu last summer, the coil in his springs seemed long gone.

"Roy Jones don't have his legs no more," said Floyd Mayweather Sr. who trains Hanshaw now. "He can't beat my guy."

Mayweather's new guy Hanshaw doesn't possess the once-in-a-lifetime talent of Jones. But the Ohio native paid his dues with more than 300 amateur fights and sports an undefeated record as a professional prizefighter.

In the South most fans of Jones know little of recent dealings, they only remember the incredible athletic feats he displayed on national television many times.

"Who else can throw a six-punch combination?" asked Jones while in Los Angeles last week to

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promote his coming fight.

Others remember Jones beating James Toney with a combination of speed and flair while rarely being touched. That's the Jones most people in the South expect to see.

"That Jones is gone," Mayweather said.

Hanshaw predicts he will be the showstopper.

"I'm going to be the guy that retires Roy Jones Jr.," said Hanshaw, 29, with Jones sitting a mere four feet away.

Jones sat bemused by the talk and strangely less animated than in his press conferences of recent years. He's almost too calm.

"Come July I can put on a show," said Jones. "None of the 12 Pound for Pound fighters can put out a five-punch combination like Roy Jones Jr."

Whether Jones still has his legs or incredible hand-speed does not matter. Fans will still drive to Biloxi to see him perform one last time.

"I'm going to knock out Roy Jones Jr.," Hanshaw promises to do in Mississippi.

Southern fight fans will be there in force and maybe for the last hurrah.