

Glen Johnson: All That's Good About Boxing

Written by Robert Mladinich
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Former light heavyweight champion Glen "Road Warrior" Johnson will bide his time waiting for his mandatory shot against IBF titlist Clinton Woods by taking on journeyman "Fabulous" Fred Moore tonight, Friday, July 27, at the Sheraton Miami Mart Hotel in Florida.

The show is the inaugural event of the "Rumble in Paradise" series being promoted by the Richard Dobral's upstart Bad Dog Productions, in association with Seminole Warriors Boxing.

It is expected that the 4,500 seat arena will be sold out. Future shows are scheduled for August 24, September 21 and November 21.

The 38-year-old Johnson, a native of Jamaica who lives in Miami, is one of the classiest boxers and finest human beings you will ever meet.

He is known for never taking a short cut in training, but has made a career of taking tough fights on short notice in faraway places, often for purses that were downright demeaning. No one can ever accuse Johnson of not learning his craft the hard way.

His 45-11-2 (30 KOS) record is not indicative of just how good of a fighter he is. Besides being forced to fight on the road so often, Johnson worked a second job for much of his boxing career.

He spent his days in the hot Florida sun, toiling tirelessly on a construction site. Afterwards he made a beeline for the gym.

The hard-punching Moore, 30-6 (27 KOS), a native of Philadelphia who also lives in Miami and once worked as a sparring partner for Johnson, has some similarities in his background.

Although he never reached championship status like Johnson did, the 40-year-old father of two daughters who has been boxing professionally since 1994, always augmented his boxing income by working one, and sometimes even two jobs. He is currently employed as the front desk manager at the ultra chic Sanctuary Hotel in Miami's hip South Beach.

Moore has not fought since November 2005, and he has lost his last three. However, he was recently brought out of semi-boxing retirement by trainer Buddy McGirt to spar with former champion Tomasz Adamek in nearby Vero Beach. One thing led to another, and Moore now finds himself in the biggest fight of his life.

Although he and Johnson are friends who have sparred over the years, the 6'3" Moore, a southpaw, realizes that a victory over the 5'11" Johnson could jumpstart his career, even at this late stage. The deeply religious Moore, who admits to believing in miracles, is hoping to pull one off against Johnson.

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"This is a great opportunity in my career," the soft-spoken, mild-mannered and deeply spiritual Moore told the Miami Herald. "I kept asking God for another good opportunity. All of a sudden there was the offer to fight Glen. God answered my prayers."

God might have given him a golden opportunity against Johnson, but Johnson has had even more bubbles burst in his career than Moore has. Known as a quintessential road warrior, he has, with the exception of Carlos Baldomir, probably logged more airline miles than any active ex-champion.

Sadly, Johnson has been screwed in one way or another in many countries. He was scheduled to fight super middleweight champion Joe Calzaghe in Wales, but was strung along for what seemed like an eternity before being dropped from consideration.

Along the way he has lost decisions, many of which were very close, to, among others, Sven Ottke in Germany, Silvio Branco in Italy, and Julio Gonzalez in California.

He also battled Clinton Woods three times in Woods's native England, winning once to garner the IBF title, losing once, and drawing in the other. All of those fights, however, could have easily gone Johnson's way.

Johnson's biggest victory was a stunning ninth round knockout of Roy Jones Jr. in September 2004. He out-punched the once mighty Jones 437 to 270. In his very next fight, Johnson beat Antonio Tarver by decision, but lost the rematch in similar fashion not long afterwards.

Now, four bouts later, the irrepressible Johnson, who was voted Fighter of the Year by the Boxing Writers Association of America in 2004, the year that he beat Jones and Tarver, is right back in the title mix. In May, he stopped Montell Griffin in eleven rounds in an elimination bout that guaranteed him a rematch against Woods should Woods beat Julio Gonzalez in their upcoming bout.

The ultra-gentlemanly Johnson is an unlikely boxer, much less a world class, championship caliber one. When he moved to Florida at the age of 14, he was filled with ambition but no direction. The only boxer he had ever heard of was Muhammad Ali. Like so many other youngsters with time on their hands, he discovered boxing by accident and proved to be a quick study.

The only man to ever beat him hand's down, he says, was Hopkins, who stopped him in eleven rounds in a 1997 IBF middleweight title fight in California.

"To this day, no man has ever kept me at bay like Bernard did," said the refreshingly candid and disarmingly honest Johnson. "I'd never fought a guy like Bernard. Nothing I had ever experienced, not in fighting, not in gym sparring, prepared me for what that guy did to me."

The chances are that Moore won't provide such a stern test, but you never know. He's got a high knockout percentage and stoppage wins over four previously undefeated fighters. Among the top fighters who beat him were former champions Reggie Johnson and Quincy Taylor.

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But this night seems to be, more than anything else, a showcase for Johnson.

With another fight against Woods, who Johnson has arguably already beaten three times, looming, the Road Warrior seems much too sensible to do anything but win sensibly against Moore. A father of three children himself, Johnson is a consummate family man and a superb ring technician who knows how to amp up the voltage when it is necessary. His stirring victory over Jones is testament to that savvy.

No one in the world believed he stood a chance against Jones. No one, that is, except Johnson and his loyal team of trainers and assistants.

They are much too wise to look past Moore, who has everything to gain and nothing to lose. But you just know that Johnson is envisioning once again having that IBF belt wrapped around his streamlined waist.

A pro since 1993, Johnson is not about to see his lofty dreams go awry. Not against Moore, nor against anyone else they put in front of him in the immediate future.

"I'm not claiming I'm the best this or the best that," Johnson once said after a major victory. "But I'm the guy who is willing to fight the self-claimed best."

He is an eloquent spokesman for an often maligned sport. He is also a walking and punching advertisement for all that is good about the sweet science. He is, after all, living proof that sometimes nice guys do finish first. That's the way it should be.

The fight venue is located at N.W. 72nd Avenue and SR 836 in Miami. Tickets range from \$20 to \$100 and VIP tables of eight are available. Log on to Ticketmaster.com or call Bad Dog Productions at 305-265-1437 for tickets.