

Left Hook Lacy Is Now Just Jeff

Written by Michael Woods

Thursday, 15 November 2007 19:00

Arguably, there hasn't been a more stunning fall from grace in recent boxing history than Jeff Lacy's.

The body-beautiful hitter from Florida was anointed, by a drippingly complimentary fight press, coming in to his March 4, 2006 showdown with Joe "DO NOT Call Him Slappy Joe" Calzaghe as a future superstar.

He had a flashy physique, a flashy signature punch, a flashy nickname ("Left Hook Lacy")...and his prospects went up in a flashy puff of smoke when Calzaghe doled out a dose of painful reality in Manchester, England.

Calzaghe got angles on the more-immobile-than-we thought Lacy, who entered the ring at M.E.N Arena with a blemish-free 21-0 record, and showed him the meaning of ring generalship. Calzaghe's stock shot to the moon, while Lacy's tanked like a subprime stinker. No one would have been terribly surprised if the shocking whopping sent the Floridian, now age 30, to a permanent hiatus from the sport. The whopping was that complete.

But Lacy (22-1, 17 KOs) is back, and he says, fired up to fight again.

He'll meet up with another Calzaghe-conquer-ee, Peter Manfreda, on the undercard of the Dec. 8 Mayweather/Hatton scrap in Las Vegas.

Can he shift the momentum back to a time when there was positivity surrounding him? Lacy was the first man from the vastly disappointing 2000 US Olympic squad to snag a title, the vacated IBF 168 pound strap, from Syd Vanderpool, on October 2, 2004. Perhaps he can get back in that frame of consciousness. But there have been chronic injuries, and then the bad beatdown. A restoration of his rep, and psyche, is a tall order.

He'll need to be physically whole, or, at least, as whole as your average boxer can be, to re-elevate himself. Lacy is coming off surgery to his arm (shoulder, bicep), and he says that he's at 100%, bodily.

"I've been in training for the last five months, with rehabilitation of my left shoulder, making it to a point where I feel comfortable throwing it," he says. "So it's been months that I've been in training camp, and I am really looking forward to my return to the ring. We signed with Oscar de la Hoya, all the lights shine and I'm ready to go."

Mentally, he says that the Calzaghe loss has helped him mature.

"The main thing I've learned that I'm a very emotional person when it comes down to what people read and what people say about you," he says. "I've learned to understand and deal with emotion a lot better than I did before because when you're on that winning stage, it's like

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everybody's praising you and everybody's doing this and that. But when you get a chance to taste a little bit of the bad side of boxing, it kind of really turns your stomach a little bit and keeps you focused on you.

I've learned mostly more about myself. It's all about what Jeff wants to do. What do I want to do, and when do I want to do it, and then if I come to the plate, my fans are going to be happy no matter what. And that's the main thing I've learned in the last 24 months."

Manfredo cannot be seen as a gimme for Lacy, not after he looked so uninspired against Vitali Tsytko (MD10 win) on Dec. 2, 2006, his first and only fight after the Calzaghe disappointment. But it was revealed after that he tore his shoulder up early on in that scrap, so his subpar performance was mitigated.

But the Rhode Islander, too, comes in as re-furbished goods, as it were, having had left elbow surgery in August to quiet bone spurs and bone chips.

On the subject of refurbished goods, we really don't know how Lacy's head is, if the aching in his psyche from being knocked violently off his pedestal has receded, if he still enjoys the business of boxing enough to be able to concentrate on the difficult task at hand. That, in itself, may be a more rigorous fight than Peter Manfredo will provide on December 8.