

Tarver Calls Out Calzaghe

Written by Rick Folstad
Wednesday, 23 April 2008 19:00

TAMPA - There's a guy in this town just looking for a fight.

He doesn't want to meet some punk in a dark alley, or cause a disturbance in a friendly neighborhood saloon, maybe break some chairs and bottles. He wants this fight to be held someplace legitimate, someplace where the money is good, the rules are written down, and there's somebody standing close by to make sure no one cheats and gets away with it.

The guy in this town itching for a fight looks like an accountant and sounds like an unemployed postal worker. A southpaw, he says he doesn't care what city or town they hold this fight in, as long as they hold it somewhere. How about Milwaukee, Sydney, Burbank, Sheffield? He doesn't care. Just book it. All he wants is the chance to prove that he's the best light-heavyweight in the world. If he lived on your block, you'd probably call him a bully.

IBF light-heavyweight champ Antonio Tarver, born in Orlando and claiming Tampa as his hometown, is looking for Wales' newest champion, Joe Calzaghe. He'll meet him at high noon on Main Street if that works for Joe and the pay is good.

Maybe Tarver is feeling jilted.

"Everyone was mentioned as Calzaghe's potential next opponent but me, the true light-heavyweight champion," Tarver was quoted as saying in a press release following Calzaghe's win over Bernard Hopkins on Saturday. "I am the real legend killer. I beat Roy Jones, Jr., not once, but twice. I have also beaten Glen Johnson and Clinton Woods...I'm on my way to unifying the belts this year. I will fight Calzaghe in the U.S., in the U.K. or wherever he wants to fight."

Sounds like someone anxious to duke it out. Tarver doesn't claim he'll just beat Calzaghe, he's gone a little further with his boast, delivered a second poke in the eye.

"I am putting the world on notice that I am the boxer who can stop Calzaghe," Tarver said. "Having just beaten his fellow countryman, Clinton Woods, Calzaghe should step up and fight me to defend the honor of his country."

Pop quiz: The real light-heavyweight champion of the world is: A. A gangling southpaw from Orlando; B. A tall, slender, quiet guy named Chad Dawson; C. A friendly chap from Wales; D. None of the above.

The light-heavyweight division isn't so much a weight class as it is a neighborhood barbecue, a gathering place for disgruntled super-middleweights and frustrated cruiserweights.

There was a time long, long ago - even before the Roy Jones, Jr. era - when there was only one crowned light-heavyweight champ of the world, and no cruiserweight or super-middleweight

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divisions. This was back in the time when Volkswagens and Mustangs still roamed the earth in great numbers, back before e-mails, laptops and American Idol. This was back when it was still safe to eat bacon, open a door for a lady or cut someone off in traffic.

There was no confusion back then. You knew who the light-heavyweight champ was. He was Bob Foster. Or he was Archie Moore or Dick Tiger or Joey Maxim. Billy Conn was a pretty good light-heavy until he moved up to the heavyweight division to fight no ordinary Joe.

But they served alone.

Now, like many other weight divisions, we've got a log jam at 175 pounds, give or take a couple cheeseburgers. You've got Tarver, Dawson, WBO champ Zsolt Erdei, and Calzaghe, the man who beat the man (Hopkins), who beat the man (Tarver).

I'm going with answer D.