The first question that comes to mind when thoughts turn to the all-but-finalized fight on Sept. 20 between Joe Calzaghe and Roy Jones, Jr. is a simple one – “Why?’’

The question might more rightly be “Who cares?’’ but someone must, or HBO and Madison Square Garden wouldn’t be putting up millions to make it happen, would they? The fact that they are leads us to another question for the suits in boxing who apparently seem to care enough to write such a check and it takes us back to our original premise – “Why?’’

From the point of view of undefeated Joe Calzaghe the fight makes sense because it’s minimum risk for maximum pay and allows him to avoid younger and more formidable opponents like WBC light heavyweight champion Chad Dawson or a rematch with Mikkel Kessler, the former super middleweight title holder who had his moments before Calzaghe took over their unification fight and slapped him silly in the second half of their unification fight last year.

But as for the 39-year-old Jones, it’s an undeserved back door chance at another title and a serious payday far in excess of what he deserves for beating up a sad shadow once known as Felix Trinidad in his last outing.

The fact of the matter is Jones has lost three of his last six fights and those are the meaningful ones. Yet you can bet the hype before he faces Calzaghe will be that he’s on a three-fight win streak. That’s accurate but not reflective of the truth because what does it mean when you are stopped twice, by Antonio Tarver and Glen Johnson, then lose a decision to Tarver by a wide margin and come back to outpoint Prince Badi Ajamu, Anthony Hanshaw and Trinidad?

Ajamu was far from royalty in the ring, Hanshaw has become the boxing definition of the word disappointment and Trinidad was simply an old man trying to re-live his youth. So what it means is that Jones hasn’t had a significant victory over a serious opponent since he outpointed then WBA heavyweight champion John Ruiz five years ago. That, of course, assumes you considered Ruiz a serious opponent, which most folks did not. That’s why Jones was the betting favorite.

You may have noticed absent from that list is Jones’ “victory’’ over Tarver in their first fight, a majority decision in which two of the three blind mice were not only in attendance at ringside but in the employee of the Nevada State Athletic Commission at the time - as judges.

If you discount thus dismiss the first Tarver “win’’ as nonsense and dismiss Ruiz as a less than formidable champion you have to go back pretty far to find the last time Jones actually fought anybody. In truth, Roy Jones, Jr. is a guy who made a career out of beating up second tier fighters ever since he dominated James Toney on Nov. 18, 1994. After that he knocked down and beat up every form of municipal worker (a cop, a fireman, a trash man, a mail man, a bus driver and a school teacher). How he missed a cab driver we’ll never know.

To his credit, he did undress the very capable Reggie Johnson with ease nine years ago and stopped Clinton Woods for seven of the eight available forms of the light heavyweight title in 2002, although Woods is not likely to ever get into the International Boxing Hall of Fame without having bought a ticket himself.

While it is true Jones is the first former middleweight champion in 106 years to move up to heavyweight and win the title so attention must be paid, had that fight not happened five years ago it might say something about him today. A half a decade is a long time however, especially when you're now 39 1⁄2 years old and haven't beaten a formidable opponent in years.

Which brings us back to the question that continues to baffle – why? Why has this fight been made? Calzaghe will say it's because Jones is a legend. Of course, so is Bob Foster but he wouldn't be trying to sell a fight with him for the light heavyweight title, would he?

Jones' legendary status has always, at least from the view from this corner, been as one of the greatest managers of all time. Somehow he managed to avoid a hint of any risk taking for nearly a decade, from the time he fought Toney until the time he took on Ruiz, and still convinced a lot of the public he was the Pensacola version of Sugar Ray Robinson. That's not an easy thing to do. Retaining the aura of being greater than you are is a difficult task but Jones pulled it off, so give him some props for that.

HBO was a co-conspirator in that fraud of course, constantly airing his fights and making them sound like more than they were rather than forcing him into challenging equally undefeated Dariusz Michalczewski or granting Toney a rematch at a higher weight.

Then there's the issue of why he and Bernard Hopkins never fought a rematch or how he avoided Antonio Tarver for so long before Tarver beat him twice (many believe it was actually thrice) and became the first man to knock him cold but we'll leave that for another day.

Jones was an infinitely talented boxer, the possessor of gifts from a power greater than Himself even though he himself didn't seem to believe that such a possibility existed. To Jones there was never a power greater than Himself (sorry let's get it right - HIMSELF) and he parlayed that bravado, his great athletic skills and the absence or avoidance of any formidable opponents into a long career in which he bamboozled the public and a lot of people who should have known better into being seen as more than he was.

Then came KO losses to Tarver and Johnson and then a third fight with Tarver in which he was utterly dominated and not competitive and later implied he'd tanked the outcome to prevent his estranged father, Roy, Sr., from getting any credit for training him back to victory. Oh, and did we forget the positive drug test in 2000 for androstenedione, which was a banned substance at the time according to IBF rules? He avoided punishment there as deftly as he avoided Hopkins, Toney, Tarver and Michalczewski for all those years so give him one thing – he's elusive.

At that point it seemed the Roy Jones Error was finally over but just when it was time to leave the stage he decided he wanted to fight. Three wins over the same kind of opposition he built his reputation on in the first place and he's back in a big-money pay-per-view show with the

longest reigning champion in boxing. Which only goes to show you'll never go broke selling certain kinds of fertilizer to the American sports fan.

Calzaghe (45-0, 32 KO) held the WBO super middleweight title for just short of 11 years before moving up to 175 pounds and out pointing finally aging Bernard Hopkins in a slap fest in April. To do it he had to get off the deck from an early knockdown but Calzaghe had Hopkins fading at the end and won in convincing if unspectacular fashion.

Now he's found another old geezer to square off with in Jones, a man whose reputation exceeds his resume, especially of late, by a wide margin.

John Wirt, the new CEO of Square Ring (Jones' seldom used promotional company) said this week that, "With Roy it's an honor that Joe has agreed to do the fight with him.''

Considering how little he's done to earn the fight that may be the most truthful statement ever uttered about Roy Jones, Jr.