

James Toney On Klitschkos: "They're Garbage"

Written by Ron Borges
Thursday, 17 July 2008 19:00

James Toney was fit to be tied, which generally means he's feeling just fine.

It had been less than 24 hours since the four-time world champion convinced former heavyweight belt holder Hasim Rahman to quit in his corner after three rounds despite a doctor's advice that that really wasn't necessary and he was still relishing a victory that has made him suddenly relevant again in the heavyweight division. Or so he kept loudly insisting.

"They're all going to run from James Toney," the soon to become 40-year-old roared through a phone from the West Coast. "I want to fight the biggest and the best out there. I ain't one of those cowards. I fight the best and I put them on their ass.

"I watched two rounds of (Wladimir) Klitschko fighting some bum from D.C. (Tony Thompson) and shut it off (thus missing the nine less than compelling rounds that followed before Thompson sat out a 10-count). HBO should be shot in the ass for spewing out all that money to him and his sister, Vitali. That's right, fool, his sister can't fight either. They won't fight anybody so they sure won't fight me.

"These European fighters, these English fighters (read newly elevated former cruiserweight champion David Haye there) can't get no respect from me. They're garbage. Those overseas guys get force fed bums then they come over here and get destroyed. Look what happened to that boy (Ricky) Hatton.

"I'm a real fighter. I'll fight anybody. Those Europeans? Garbage!"

That may not be the most diplomatic way to convince someone like the brothers Klitschko or WBC champion Samuel Peter to face him but Toney can always argue he didn't take a shot at African-born fighters like Peter, with whom he lost first a split decision and then a unanimous one in back-to-back title elimination fights which, while they may have derailed Toney for a time, have obviously yet to eliminate him.

Rahman learned that the hard way even before their Wednesday night confrontation ended in three rounds with a cut above his right eye causing him apparent heart failure. When Toney showed up several days before the fight at the Pechanga Resort and Casino in far better physical condition than his many critics expected, Rahman's resolve, according to Toney, began to wane.

Although he had failed to reach 218 pounds, as Toney had predicted he would, he did manage to come in nearly 10 pounds lighter than when he last faced Rahman two years earlier and fought him to a lackluster draw.

This time Toney was quicker but it really was his advanced degree in ring slickness that kept putting him in position to lace Rahman's face with unseen right hands long before the two

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collided heads and Rahman suffered a half inch cut above his right eye.

According to both the ringside physician and referee Ray Corona the cut was not enough to stop the fight from continuing but Rahman’s medical degree disputed their conclusion. Three times he said he couldn’t see even though he obviously could see both Dr. Paul Wallace and Corona well enough in front of him to argue with them. Not having a mirror he couldn’t see the cut but the sight of his own blood was more than enough to convince him that soon blindness would set in.

“He was looking for a way out of there as soon as I came into town and he saw me,” Toney (71-6-3, 43) claimed. “The look on his face was priceless.

“They didn’t think I’d come in in that kind of shape. When I did, they didn’t want no part of me. What happened Wednesday night should have happened two years ago (when they fought to that desultory draw). That was my fault. Nobody else’s.

“I take all the blame. I listened to people I shouldn’t have and was lifting too many weights and not boxing enough. Now I’m healthy for the first time since the (Evander) Holyfield fight so I’m doing the things I should have done a long time ago.”

What Toney would like to do most now is get a third shot at Peter, who is sort of scheduled to face the elder Klitschko this October if Klitschko can survive a full training camp. His body has failed to do that in several years so it remains a long shot but waiting in the wings in case of an emergency will be Toney, who would like nothing better than to face either the winner or the WBC champion himself if that fight fails to come off.

“I’ll fight anybody,” Toney reiterated, “but Sam Peter is the guy I want the most. I want to knock him out. He’s supposed to be some big knockout artist. A big knockout artist ain’t supposed to run from me. That’s all he did. He ran all night.

“He’s always saying, ‘Who’s next?’ I’m next! If he wants me he can have me.

“I need to stay active. I love to fight. You’ve known me all my career. You know I LOVE to fight! When my mind is right I can beat anybody.”

Toney’s love affair with boxing and belligerence are well documented. He may not always love to train and he may often be his own worst enemy when it comes to physical preparation but the man does indeed love to fight. He’d fight over almost anything, including the need for cardiovascular fitness, but no one can argue that his ring knowledge, calmness under fire and old time skills are not arguably the best in boxing today.

At 40 (his birthday is next month), Toney is obviously past his prime but he will tell you at least he had a prime, which he would contend has not been the case with any of today’s heavyweight champions. Considering what he sees as a passel of guys who have no idea how to really fight, he contends his time is now and who wants to argue that point with him?

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Toney’s reduced weight and continued goal to get back down to the 217 pounds he was the night he dropped Holyfield before the fight was stopped with Toney standing over Holyfield as he struggled to get up seem to support his claim.

Toney’s biggest enemy has always been his lack of conditioning, which begat a series of injuries that limited what he could do to prepare for bouts against men naturally far bigger than the former middleweight champion was. The latter will always be the case but Toney could care less about that and his success as a heavyweight argues for him being given one last chance to show what a smaller but wiser man can do. Whether he ever gets it is another matter entirely however because Toney doesn’t win with the kind of explosive knockout power that would demand attention.

He beats guys down by beating them up and so is more easily avoided by men who deftly can use the politics of the sport to defend them when doing so in a more traditional fashion might be problematic for them.

If his personally imposed hard times are now behind him, Hasim Rahman will not be the last heavyweight to taste the sting of James Toney’s fists or feel the state of confusion and doubt his defensive prowess and counter punching skills can create. But before that can happen, Toney fully expects Rahman and his promotional team to try and claim the fight should have been ruled a no contest because of the accidental head butt that opened up the cut above his eye.

The rules argue otherwise but in boxing that often doesn’t matter because rough justice in the sport isn’t only meted out inside the ropes. Still this time Toney is confident no one will be able to take his victory away from him, as happened when he appeared to outpoint then WBA champion John Ruiz only to learn later that he’d tested positive for performance enhancing drugs and therefore had to give up the title.

“All they got to do is look at the videotape when the doctor asked him if he wanted to fight and he said he couldn’t see,” Toney said. “The guy’s a front runner who was looking to quit the minute he realized who he was in there with.”

Who Hasim Rahman was in there with this time was the real James Toney. The one who once held various forms of the middleweight, super middleweight, light heavyweight and cruiserweight titles and became a heavyweight contender skilled enough to have won the WBA title for a few days before it was taken away from him by medical fiat. He won them all by administering nearly as many boxing lessons as his legendary former trainer and boxing mentor, Bill Miller, gave him.

Rahman found himself in there with a guy who not only knows how to fight and still can but also is a heavyweight who actually wants to fight. Which one is a more important skill these days is debatable but if you have them both you’re difficult to beat even at 40.

“This is what I do,” Toney said. “It’s what I know. I’m a fighter. Fighters fight. These heavyweights aren’t fighters. They pick and choose opponents. They avoid each other. I don’t avoid nobody.”

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“All I’m looking for is a chance to come and fight these bums. I’m back, chump. What they gonna do about it?”

More than likely try avoidance over confrontation unless one of them adopts James Toney’s basic description of himself and decides, “Hey, I’m a fighter, too.”