

Not A Rock, He's Limestone

Written by Ron Borges
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What separates the boxer from the rest of us is he goes forward when most people would retreat. Add Hasim Rahman to the list of the rest of us.

The former two-time WBC heavyweight belt holder has always been a glib guy, pleasant and smiling in a sport where that is sometimes a lost art. He is difficult to dislike, which makes him a nice and amiable fellow but it doesn't make him a warrior, as he reminded us again on Wednesday night.

Some guys enter the ring like a gladiator, willing to die on his shield. Others pull that shield over their heads when things get tough. Put Rock in that category.

In full view of who ever took the time to tune in to the Best Damn Sports Show, Rahman quit in a fight both he and four-time world champion James Toney admitted was a crossroad showdown for two aged ex-champions nearing the end. The difference between them was that Toney has always been a fighter despite his other flaws while Rahman has been a frontrunner and a con man all his professional life in prize fighting.

Put someone in front of Rock that he feels fairly sure he can beat up or over power and he's an aggressive, fighting machine. Put someone in front of him who is inclined to fight back and has somewhat more than rudimentary skills and, well, Hasim Rahman tends to do what he did against James Toney.

Let disgusted referee Ray Corona tell you exactly what that was.

"Rahman quit," Corona said after having to stop the fight after three rounds because a man who calls himself Rock became Putty after being cut above his left eye from an accidental head butt. "He was looking for another way (out)."

If this was a one-time occurrence you could say it happens or you could say the man is 35 and at the end and simply chose not to push on. You could talk a bit about the night he knocked out Lennox Lewis with a blind punch he threw with his eyes closed at a time when he certainly appeared to many people watching as if he was waiting for someone to stop the fight and raise Lewis' hand and make the best of it.

But Rahman (45-7-2, 36 KO) has now been knocked out by Lewis in a rematch, twice knocked out by Oleg Maskaev, stopped by Evander Holyfield after he suffered a contusion on his head that swelled hideously, was beaten in one-sided fashion by John Ruiz after he stopped fighting after Ruiz hit him in the body with not only bad intentions but harsh consequences, lost and drew with David Tua and drew and quit against Toney.

In other words, except for that upset of Lewis with his eyes closed, Hasim Rahman has lost pretty much every significant fight of his life and quit one way or another in several of them,

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which is the larger sin.

What he did against Ruiz was hard for the untrained eye to detect but it was obvious to some at ringside and very much so to Ruiz and his then manager, Norman Stone, who laughed about how Rahman reacted once he got hit to the body. What he did against James Toney was tap out, a form of quitting accepted in UFC's octagon but frowned upon inside a boxing ring.

Toney crowed after the stoppage that, "I made him quit." There are times when James Toney tilts toward exaggeration. This was not one of them.

Corona was clearly disgusted by the whole manner in which Rahman conducted himself after the clash of heads and made it known, which is unusual for a referee. Most of the time the referee simply accept a man's decision to retire his war commission, even if he has internal doubts about the severity of the injury. Corona chose another course after watching Rahman bow out, perhaps realizing a golfer had shown more grit during the U.S. Open than Rahman was showing in a boxing ring.

Late in the round Toney twice bashed Rahman with stinging right hands that snapped his head back despite the fact the half inch cut wasn't, in the grand scheme of what boxing is about, all that serious. Rahman, not surprisingly, concluded he couldn't see the punches because of his eye when the reality was he didn't see the punches because Toney used his skill to lure him into places he shouldn't have gone and made him pay for it.

When ringside physician Dr. Paul Wallace examined the cut between rounds he ruled it was not severe enough to stop the contest and sat down. Rahman did the same. He stayed seated as well, stating three times that "I can't see." This left him plausible deniability later on, when the inevitable protest over the decision comes and boxing politics take over.

Technically, Hasim Rahman didn't say "No mas." He said instead the equivalent of, "Work with me on this my brother, my eye wants no mas and neither do I even if that doctor over there should beef up his malpractice insurance if he thinks I'm going to keep fighting if I can get out of here with a no contest and a band-aid."

What Corona believed Rahman was doing was calculating the possibilities that he could get out of the ring at the Pechanga Resort without a loss and with a full paycheck without further risk. This assessment was based on Rahman asking Corona what round it was at the end of Round 3. In most states, if a fight is stopped on cuts after an unintentional head butt before the end of four rounds it's ruled a no contest. Later than that and they go to the scorecards, which in this case most assuredly would have favored Toney if another round or two dragged on the way the first three had gone.

What he forgot was if the doctor in attendance says you are fit to fight and the referee sees no reason why you should not continue, your insistence to sit this dance out means you lose.

"I'm not going to fight with one eye," Rahman was quoted as saying. Guys like Carmen Basilio or Arturo Gatti would need a translator to understand that statement. So would not only great

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fighters like Ray Robinson but also a tough old journey man like Billy Douglas, the father of one-time heavyweight champion Buster Douglas, who fought long hours for short money on shorter notice and never let pain or temporary blindness dissuade him from doing all he was capable of to win.

At the final press conference several days before the fight Rahman had said, "The loser of this fight should retire."

We have to hope he's a man of his word. Heavyweight boxing has grown tired of watching Rahman's well-worn act of losing a high profile fight and then going back to the bush leagues to beat up three, four, five or six guys like Dickie Ryan, who has become a professional resume inflator (or re-inflator in Rock's case) before somebody decides to resurrect him one last time because he has a good nickname, gives good press conference and once knocked out Lewis with a punch he threw while more blind than he was at any point against Toney (not because he was cut but because replays showed he had his eyes closed at night when he threw the blow that laid Lewis low until their rematch five months later. That night Lewis laid Rock out cold, stretching him flat on his back in short order).

Give him the latter victory though because at least he was throwing. Against Toney he was mostly being outsmarted by one of boxing's best tacticians and out hustled by a guy who even at 228 pounds was 10 pounds over the 218 he promised to be and in less than sterling physical condition.

Physically Rahman looked fitter but mentally there was no question who was the firmer man. It was James Toney, who immediately called out the brothers Klitschko, Samuel Peter and any other heavyweight with temporary custody of a world championship.

Hasim Rahman called for takeout, which is what boxing should give him.

It should take him out of a business he no longer wants to be part of and take him at his word.

"The loser of this fight should retire," Hasim Rahman said before he did both at the same time Wednesday night. Like Brett Favre, his sport should hold him to it.