

Can Jeff Lacy Get To Chapter 2?

Written by Rick Folstad
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The story goes that when Jeff “Left Hook” Lacy peeled off his shirt at the weigh-in of his first professional fight, the guy he was supposed to fight took one look at him and left town.

Good story. I like to call it the “Schwarzenegger Syndrome.”

Despite guys running to catch a bus to avoid getting into the ring with Lacy, his trip to fame and fortune seemed like a pretty smooth ride earlier in his career. Like mom’s love or a royal flush, it looked like a sure thing.

Lacy (24-1, 17 KOs) swept through the super-middleweight division like Superman, a guy with a plan, a mission and a mean, de-sobering left hook. Once he was champion, he’d hold onto the belt until he was ready to walk away. Maybe he’d win a few other titles.

But somewhere along the line, the ride toward a hall-of-fame career took some unscheduled detours. Then the tires went flat and finally, someone lost the map. Right now, there is no ETA in Canastota.

Lacy hoped to get everything back on track Wednesday night against super-middleweight Epifanio Mendoza of Colombia (28-6-1, 24 KOs). It would be the start of chapter two of Lacy’s career and legacy.

But Mendoza didn’t know anything about new chapters. In what was a close, entertaining fight, Lacy won a majority decision against a guy you’d think he would have dominated three years ago.

While Mendoza claimed he was robbed by the decision, Lacy called it a win and was glad to take it. Some of us called it a mild disappointment, not in the fight itself, but in Lacy’s lack of dominance. The beginning of chapter two didn’t look much different than the end of chapter one. Still, Lacy was satisfied.

“I felt like I did a marvelous job,” he said after the fight, his left eye swelling shut. “I went out there and beat a guy for 10 rounds.”

Well, not exactly. Mendoza, who can punch more than a little, did a little beating himself. He rocked Lacy in the second round and almost had him out. Teddy Atlas scored the round 10-8 for Mendoza. And there were other times Lacy looked like a drunk searching for a bar stool.

“He kept hitting me in the back of the head, hurting me,” Lacy said. “He wants to talk about the decision at the end. He had 10 rounds to finish me and he couldn’t do it.”

Yeah, well, Lacy didn’t finish Mendoza, either.

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The thing about the fight game is, everyone remembers your losses, but they seem to forget about your wins. Lacy won the IBF super-middleweight title four years ago when he beat Syd Vanderpool. After defending it four times, he booked a ticket to England to face Joe Calzaghe. We all know what happened in Manchester. And for Lacy, nothing has been quite the same since.

Ask a fight fan who Lacy beat to win the title and he'll probably stumble a little and toss out a few names. Then ask him who beat Lacy. No problem.

Since the Calzaghe licking, Lacy has fought three times. He won a majority decision over Vitali Tsypko in December 2006, despite fighting with a torn rotator cuff suffered in the second round; he won a close decision over Peter Manfredo a year later; and he beat Mendoza Wednesday night in another close fight.

Against Manfredo, he said he had a "muscle definition problem," that made him tight.

"Sometimes you've got to take the bump in the road and learn from it, which I did," Lacy said. "The last two years I haven't had a lot of success, but I've won."

But what happened to the guy who pummeled Robin Reid three years ago?

"A lot of people think I'm not the same (fighter) I was," Lacy said before the Mendoza fight. "Are you kidding? How could you ever say that about someone winning fights with a torn rotator cuff?"

Or muscle definition problems.

"I have it all together now," he said shortly before fighting Mendoza. "I'm going to go out there and look impressive."

He went out there and won, which is what he had to do. The only thing that was impressive was his chin. Mendoza gave it a good test.

Now there's talk that Lacy, who is fighting under the Golden Boy banner, could face former middleweight champ Jermain Taylor, Lacy's Olympic roommate out of Arkansas.

According to the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, that fight will take place on Nov. 15.

But maybe not. Shortly after the Lacy-Taylor fight was announced, Lacy said he was quitting the ring. Claims they weren't going to pay him enough to fight Taylor. Nice move, Jeff, but a little obvious.

Expect a short retirement. Lacy needs that fight more than Taylor. And where else can he make \$500,000 for three month's work?