

This Would've Been Huge...In 2006

Written by Phil Woolever

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NASHVILLE SLUGGING SKYLINE - There could be a ring of fire as faded stars try to cash in amidst the green hills of Tennessee. When former champions Jermain Taylor and Jeff Lacy meet at Vanderbilt University Memorial Gymnasium Saturday night, there could be some pickin' and grinnin' and there could be some twang about somebody doing somebody wrong. Either man could look haggard well within the scheduled twelve round distance.

Hangovers and pickups aside, there's definitely a jarring jukebox element to this clash of fallen previously perceived titans.

There was a time not long ago both competitors were at the top of their game, recognized titlists climbing the pound for pound ladder.

At this time of year in 2006, the fight very well might have been the Vegas holiday spectacular, with ticket prices at multiple times the current asking price. Now instead, even the local channels will feature many football scores before broadcasting news about the fight, however fine it might turn out.

And while Taylor-Lacy should indeed be more of a dandy than a dud, it illustrates how quickly status can shift in boxing's mauling market.

"This is a fight both of us need," said Taylor. "Especially me, coming off two losses."

"I know this is a must win fight and I'm up for it," said Lacy. "I know Jermain will be too."

This affair would once have been looked at with Fight of the Year potential, now it's relegated to a tier well below pairings like Joe Calzaghe - Roy Jones, Bernard Hopkins - Kelly Pavlik and Ricky Hatton - Paulie Malignaggi, and not anywhere near the stratosphere of Oscar de la Hoya - Manny Pacquiao.

Of course the facts that Pavlik thumped the 30-year old Taylor, 27-2-1 (17 KOs), twice and Calzaghe may have ruined 31-year old Lacy, 24-1 (17 KOs), have plenty to do with things, it seems cruel when considering both Saturday's principals have only lost to one man each as pros. Tough career choice, indeed.

The key to victory may well be how well either Taylor or Lacy can emulate the style that toppled their respective rivals. Considering that, it appears the 6'1 Taylor has to be a solid favorite since he is built better to fight the straight up, firing at all angles sort of charge that Calzaghe used to bust up Lacy.

Taylor had problems with both naturally smaller foes Cory Spinks and Kassim Ouma, but Lacy isn't near the technician Spinks is or Ouma was, and at 5'10 "Left Hook" isn't likely to fight tall enough to win face to face trades a' la Pavlik.

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Taylor also gets the handicapping nod in recent opposition. He's been in against nothing but world class fighters since blasting out Daniel Edouard in February of 2005. Lacy's toughest foe since the Calzaghe debacle was probably Peter Manfredo, Jr. Lacy didn't have an easy night there, and he couldn't win on all the scorecards against either Vitali Tsypko or Epifanio Mendoza.

At the Lennox Lewis-Mike Tyson gala, mega-sponsors Showtime and HBO split everything, including the ring right down the middle. I'm not certain on the network, but for featured undercard performers each cable giant picked one potential future star. One picked Pacquiao, one (Showtime I think) picked Lacy.

Lacy broke his right hand scoring a first round stoppage in his third fight. He's gained a reputation as a brave brawler who fights through multiple injuries since then.

Now, the US 2000 Olympic team mates who strongly disagree on who dominated amateur sparring face off to determine future paychecks and what's billed as a guarantee (yeah, right) to next meet the winner of Carl Froch-Jean Pascal for the WBC middleweight belt.

"I'm hungry and I'm ready and I know what I have to do," says the always fit Taylor, in conking cliché mode.

"We both know this is a business," said Lacy. "Everything will be all right for me now (with a win)."

Both men have two-handed class. All logical signs point to Taylor, but something says Lacy will surprise us.

They usually sing the blues more around 200 miles down the road in Memphis, but it's quite likely that whoever comes out on the short end along this mauling music row will be very close to the swan song of their professional boxing career.