

It's Time To Hang Up The Gloves, Roy

Written by Dan Horgan

Saturday, 15 November 2008 19:00

It's time for Roy Jones Jr. to hang up the gloves.

After being thoroughly out-boxed, outhustled, and out-skilled by Wales' Joe Calzaghe on November 8th, the 38-year-old Jones would be crazy to continue his fight career, which has probably lasted five years too long. Jones was great, perhaps the greatest, but he's now a shell of his former self. Fighting on any longer would be an embarrassment to his name.

It's a shame that Jones' career had to end this way. He could have retired after moving up to heavyweight to win John Ruiz's portion of the heavyweight title in 2003. He could have called it quits after edging Antonio Tarver in a historic move down to capture the light-heavyweight championship just eight months after the Ruiz win. And he could have taken a different route than fighting Tarver in a rematch – a route that wouldn't have left him knocked silly in consecutive fights.

But instead, Jones let what made him great, pride, get in the way of emphatically capping off one of the most exciting careers in sports history. He carried on, lost to Tarver in the rematch, and refused to admit that his reflexes had diminished to the point where he couldn't bang with the world's best. Jones lost four of his last seven fights convincingly; in the fifteen preceding years and fifty preceding fights, he had lost only once, and the defeat was via questionable disqualification.

Jones' legacy after beating Tarver was secure. He was a five-time champion in four weight divisions. He had avenged his only career loss with a first-round knockout. He was "Mr. Unstoppable," "RJ," and "pound-for-pound the baddest." But his ego refused to let him walk away. Tarver had given Jones all he could handle in the pair's first encounter, and Jones felt the need to punish the fellow Florida native for the close fight. And that's when everything came tumbling down – Jones' perfect resume became blemished.

Pundits of today and tomorrow will undoubtedly argue Jones' merit as an all-time great. He's a sure-lock Hall of Famer, but writers and fans have yet to come to a consensus on Jones' status amongst all-time pound-for-pound lists. The biggest question that will be debated is if Jones' latest four losses are indicative of what would have happened had he faced better opponents in his prime.

My personal view is that the past four years of Jones' career do not reflect his prime-years greatness, nor should they affect his legacy. Athletes cannot be held responsible for getting old.

Jones, many experts argue, would have been beaten by Tarver and Calzaghe, fighters of a class Jones rarely fought throughout his career, in his prime. But basing those assumptions on Jones' recent fights against the two southpaws is ludicrous. Jones' success in the ring has always been based on his extraordinary reflexes. His ability to duck a punch and counter with

It's Time To Hang Up The Gloves, Roy

Written by Dan Horgan

Saturday, 15 November 2008 19:00

lightning-fast hands always allowed him to handle bigger and stronger opponents with ease. But those reflexes, which clearly diminished with Jones' age, were long-gone when he shared the ring with Tarver and Calzaghe. The old Jones was a far different fighter than the prime Jones, and the old Jones was the one who Tarver and Calzaghe got to beat up on.

If anything, Jones' first fight against Tarver should be the most efficient gauge as to how he would have handled Tarver in his prime. In that bout, Jones – who had to lose over ten pounds of muscle in a matter of weeks as he moved from heavyweight to light-heavyweight – dug down deep to squeak out a decision, and the dynamic physical gifts that once made him so special were no longer there. If a 34-year old, muscle-depleted Jones could have taken Tarver, then his 32-year-old self, equipped with faster hands and better defensive maneuvers, would have destroyed “The Magic Man.”

Whether or not a prime Jones would have beaten Calzaghe is debatable, but the Jones who fought Calzaghe on Saturday was the worst Jones the boxing public has ever seen. Jones' other mega fights, against Bernard Hopkins, James Toney, and John Ruiz, are far better indicators of his greatness than the Calzaghe loss because Jones was at his best when he fought them.

My hope is that Jones will walk away from boxing with his head held high. To lose to a rival in a farewell bout is hard to swallow, but what Jones accomplished in the ring in his first 50 fights far overshadows the bad that happened in his last seven.

It's time for Jones to hang up the gloves. But he can retire knowing that he was one of the best to ever put them on.