

Old Bones Jones Can't Quit Boxing

Written by Ron Borges

Tuesday, 17 March 2009 19:00

Used to be is often the saddest phrase in sports. So it has become for Roy Jones, Jr.

It used to be an event whenever Jones fought, even when his opponent was an empty pair of gym shorts, which frankly was too often the case when Jones was in his prime.

It used to be that his presence alone would make otherwise intelligent HBO executives swoon, convincing them to open up their checkbook and buy fights that everyone knew wouldn't even be an argument because the opponent was some form of municipal worker by trade and a fighter by happenstance (cop, fireman, school teacher, mailman, trash man, you name it, he fought it), which frankly was too often the case.

It used to be that any fight he was involved in was on a big stage and it didn't matter where that stage was set up or how few people were willing to pay to get into it, which frankly was too often too many times.

It used to be that he was considered the best fighter in the world, which frankly was too long ago to remember when.

It used to be that he was at least the best fighter in his weight class, which frankly was also too long ago to remember when.

It used to be that he didn't seem much interested in fighting at all, which frankly would be wise if it was the case today as he approaches 41 years old.

Saturday night in Pensacola, Fla., only miles from his chicken ranch, Jones will get into the ring against Omar Sheika, who frankly is just the kind of guy he used to fight when Jones was at the top of his game – a non-threatening opponent with few things to advertise himself.

Sheika has lost six of his last 10 fights and two of his last three. It might have been worse lately but he hasn't been in the ring much lately, having fought only twice in the last 3 ½ years. To say there is no point to this would be to state the obvious.

So what is this all about for Jones, an eight-time world champion in four weight classes (middleweight, super middleweight, light heavyweight and heavyweight)? Beats him, which is what has been happening to him a lot lately, too.

“Whatever comes up (after the Sheika fight) happens,” Jones said this week when asked what his future fistic plans were.

It sounds like he could work for the Treasury Department with that plan for the future.

If there were a seniors tour in boxing, as there is in tennis and golf, Roy Jones

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Not-So-Junior-Any-More would fit in fine. He'd win most of the time, cash some checks and face no real chance of embarrassment. In other words, it would be like old times.

But these are not old times. He's just an old timer. He's become like an old crooner who didn't seem to want to be on stage when he belonged there and now won't leave when he's lost his voice. Sad, really.

Jones has lost four of his last seven fights, two by knockout and two by one-sided decision. He has not been competitive against a serious opponent since he got an undeserved decision over Antonio Tarver. He hasn't held a legitimate world title in over five years and, just for the record, it has been six years since he boxed rings around then heavyweight champion John Ruiz to become the first light heavyweight in 106 years to win boxing's ultimate prize.

Yet here he is, back in the ring five months after being slapped silly, cut open and utterly embarrassed by Joe Calzaghe, who won every round but the first the night they faced each other and ended the evening by taunting and teasing beaten and bleeding Jones the way, frankly, Jones used to insult many of the inferior fighters he faced back in the day, when all his skills were intact.

That night was sad payback, in a sense, for all the times Jones embarrassed lesser men but now he's doing it to himself fighting someone like Sheika as part of a combination boxing and mixed martial arts show at the Pensacola Civic Center. Once there was a time when it would cost you \$1000 to \$1500 to sit ringside at a Jones fight. Saturday night it's \$128 (tax included).

Good seats still available.

This week he claimed training was "going wonderful." He went on to say, "I never thought I'd be the baddest thing walking around at 40 years old but I am still the baddest."

That depends on what you mean by "baddest." Baddest aging champion still trying to make a living in a sport that has deserted him? No, Evander Holyfield claims that title.

Baddest light heavyweight in the world? No, with either definition of baddest. He's neither the baddest as in the worst nor the baddest as in the best.

Baddest 40 year old self-deluding himself? Probably not, but he's in the hunt there if you don't include Congress and members of Wall Street banking firms. By all accounts, Jones is not GM or AIG. He doesn't need any bailout money (whatever it will be and it won't be much for this fight).

He isn't moving toward any kind of a legitimate title shot either, at least not one he could win against, say, the legitimate light heavyweight champion, Chad Dawson. In fact, the thought of a Dawson-Jones match borders on suicidal. Whether you are a fan of Jones or grew weary of him speaking of himself in the third-person as if he wasn't in the room with himself, no one should wish a beating like that on him.

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So, again, what's the point?

"I think Roy has come to the realization that boxing is what he is," his father, Big Roy, theorized. "That's what made him. For a short period of time he got off track with that. Everyone knows Roy as a boxer, not a rapper, and he's come to the realization of that.

"Now don't get me wrong. I think that being pound-for-pound and world champion means a lot to him also because he's used to being at the top of the heap. He'd been that for so many years that it does play a role in his motivation to continue this thing.

"When Roy was pound-for-pound he had skills that were unorthodox because they didn't understand it. Now he doesn't have that edge that he had because he let his skills diminish. Physically you know he is in the decline because he's aging. That was always the most extraordinary thing about him – his skills. He has to be pushed (now) to exceed his limitations.

"I truly don't know what the end game is. All I can do is recommend things to him. I'll tell him what I think whether he wants to hear it or not but if he asks me to help in something then that's what I'm going to give him. Right now, in this time, he can still do this. I'll tell him point blank if I don't think he can fight and it appears to me in any kind of way. "Him getting hurt I most certainly don't want that to happen. He has a legacy that he's going to leave and I don't want it to affect that at all. If it comes to that, whether it's because of his age or his training, I will tell him."

Exactly what the hold up is on making that call remained unexplained but Big Roy did admit that if his son loses to Sheika he would "probably" tell him it was over but "it depends on why he loses. If I feel that it's necessary to tell him that in my opinion, and I'm not saying I'm an expert or anything like that, I would tell him that. Whether he would want to hear it or not, I'll be the first to tell him."

Somebody should, because boxing is like no other sport. One night too many and you don't limp the rest of your life, you are limp the rest of your life. Roy Jones, Jr. deserves a banquet and a gold watch but you don't get those things in boxing when the end comes. Instead you get a beating, which he's already gotten twice from Tarver, from Glen Johnson and from Calzaghe. He's not going to get one from Omar Shieka unless all is lost. What he's more likely to get is a false positive, a delusional misreading of both what he has left and what boxing has left for him.