

Dawson On Beating Tarver: "It's A Public Service For Boxing"

Written by Ron Borges
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It is never easy being light heavyweight champion. It's like being first runner-up in the Miss America contest. It's a title but not the one you dreamed about.

The latest fighter to suffer this fate is Chad Dawson, who defends his piece of that 175-pound title Saturday night in Las Vegas from whatever challenge 40-year-old Antonio Tarver can muster.

Dawson is pretty much by acclimation considered the best light heavyweight in the world and is on most top 10 lists of best pound-for-pound fighters on the planet. He is also about as ignored a great fighter as you could imagine.

Greatness in boxing most often demands creative tension exist. There can be no great A side without a nearly equally dangerous B side to confront him. In a business like boxing, doubt and worry are necessary if a sizeable check is to be cashed.

The last time Dawson faced Tarver there was none of that and as a consequence interest was such that the Nevada State Athletic Commission reported only 911 people paid to watch. Two guys fighting in a casino parking lot would attract that much of a crowd.

This is not the undefeated Dawson's doing. He is a highly skilled boxer who has defeated not only Tarver but also Glen Johnson, Tomasz Adamek and everyone else they've put in front of him. He is 27-0 and seldom has found himself in a fight because of his skills, not simply because someone else lacked them.

Yet when you combine that dominance with the fact he's fighting in a division that gets more ignored than advice from your mother-in-law, you see the problem. He is the man nobody knows. Or at least the man nobody is willing to pay to get to know, a trend Dawson would sorely like to see changing.

"I feel I'm the best out there," Dawson said Friday from Las Vegas. "I don't get the big fights yet but they'll come. I think people know I'm a boxer. I'm not some guy who just comes to the arena and throws 1,000 punches. I'm a 100 per cent boxer. If people can't respect that, that's what I'm trying to change."

Perhaps he'll achieve that against the 40-year-old Tarver (27-5, 19 KO) but it seems unlikely because Dawson is a 5-1 favorite and most people are scratching their heads as to why this fight is on HBO in the first place.

That it could be a boon to Dawson only because it will be preceded by the replay of the Manny Pacquiao-Ricky Hatton beat down, a scheduling situation that will draw far more eyes to him than watched Dawson-Tarver I on SHOWTIME last fall. That fight had a rating similar to the fight's live attendance. In other words, nobody watched.

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Dawson is unhappy about this and has been on a quest to find an opponent who can change that but without any luck. He has pursued retired super middleweight champion Joe Calzaghe and aging former middleweight and light heavyweight title holder Bernard Hopkins to no avail, both feeling quite rightly that at this stage of their careers if there's one thing they don't need it's a undefeated southpaw who can move, use the jab and pick you apart.

Dawson understands this but is not highly appreciative of it. Even now he is considering moving down to 168 pounds even though Calzaghe is now spending his time on his sofa because there seems more fertile ground there than at light heavyweight. Before he does so however he must first rid himself of a guy who has become an irritant to him.

"I don't resent the fact I have to fight Tarver again because he had a rematch clause and he exercised it," Dawson said of Tarver. "But I got a serious hate in my heart for him. I want to punish him.

"I don't see anything different he can do. He was in his best shape the last fight and he barely won a round. I don't care how good he did in previous rematches (with Roy Jones, Johnson and Eric Harding). They ain't me.

"But I'm not letting the first fight play into this fight. I'm not underestimating Tarver. I'm just erasing the memory of that fight from my mind."

That is wise because if he didn't Dawson would have spent more time with his three kids than he did training. He did not do that because he's professional about these matters and more importantly remains well aware that if he wants the kind of big fight that has thus far eluded him there's only one way to get it. He has to keep winning until there is no one left for him but the kind of guy he can make money with, whoever that might be.

Dawson was hopeful that might be Jermain Taylor but he was left on the floor in a heap by WBC super middleweight champion Carl Froch last month, a 12th round stoppage that did not so much elevate the undefeated Froch but rather further besmirched what was once Taylor's impeccable reputation.

Although Dawson said he continues to consider moving down to super middleweight himself, the fact is there is nothing more there for him any more than there is at light heavyweight because Taylor let him down. And so he is left with but one choice – keep winning fights until something changes.

"I'm not looking for any easy paydays," Dawson said. "That's what Bernard Hopkins is looking for. I want to make big money. I want tough fights. But I have to put that out of my mind for now.

"I think people are starting to come around. I got my big shot now on HBO. They know I'll fight anybody."

Assuming, of course, he can find anybody to make it a fight.

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"I'm in great shape and ready for this fight. Even though he didn't deserve the rematch, it was easy to get myself up for this fight. Tarver cannot stop me. I will still be world champion after Saturday night. Beating Tarver isn't just a victory for me, it's a public service for boxing"