

The Greatest Fighters Ever: Egregious Omissions/Inclusions, Part One

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Sunday, 05 July 2009 19:00

As was to be expected with the release of the greatest fighter ever nominees being announced last week pertaining to concept creator Paul Nicholson's online voting ballot, passionate debates and arguments have begun. I guess it's not a good sign when whoever sent out the release with the names of the nominees misspells the name of perhaps the greatest bantamweight in history, Eder Jofre, spelling it Joffre.

If you missed the list, here is the original piece. www.thesweetscience.com/boxing-article/6938/greatest/

After going over the list, it's astonishing reading the names that make up the list as much as it is realizing the names that are missing from it. In case some don't know, opinions can be wrong as is the case with many omissions and inclusions on the final ballot of the greatest fighters ever. One has to wonder if this event is more of a publicity and popularity contest than it is a vote on who makes up the list of authentically great fighters in boxing's original eight divisions.

I wish the names of the so called experts who made up the panel were attached to the list they submitted and released so others could judge for themselves whether their knowledge or lack of it merits them worthy of submitting a ballot making up a list that's supposed to highlight the greatest fighters/boxers in history.

TSS has already addressed some of the wrong omissions and inclusions. In this series I'll discuss the most egregious errors on the ballot that are totally inexcusable.

Egregious Omission/Inclusion One--Light Heavyweight

Sam Langford No -- Joe Calzaghe Yes?!

In what has to be the biggest miscarriage of justice of all, it's nothing short of mind-boggling seeing a light heavyweight list with the name Joe Calzaghe on it, yet Sam Langford doesn't make the cut? Langford was/is without question the most avoided fighter in boxing history. Langford's best weight was between 168 and 180 pounds. Weighing as little of 157 pounds he spotted a near prime Jack Johnson 19 pounds and went 15 rounds with him and lost a decision in a bout for the colored heavyweight title.

Langford chased Johnson around the globe during Johnson's title tenure trying to get a rematch to no avail. Langford was a terrific puncher who could also box and consistently deliver his power so much so, Johnson openly admitted that despite his small stature he was far too dangerous to fight for the small money that was available for a fight featuring two black men. Langford stopped Harry Wills twice while Wills was at or near his prime. Yes, the same Harry Wills that some accused heavyweight champ Jack Dempsey of avoiding. There wasn't a significant heavyweight during his prime years who Langford didn't meet in the ring.

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I need it explained to me exactly why Sam Langford didn't make the cut, yet Joe Calzaghe did? Can it be said even in jest that Calzaghe fought anywhere near the opposition that Langford did? No, not on your life. Speaking of lives, I'd bet mine that Langford wouldn't have lost once if he fought Calzaghe 100 times! Speaking of Calzaghe, he fought only two light heavyweights in his career, 43 year old Bernard Hopkins and 39 year old Roy Jones. In those two bouts Calzaghe was down twice and didn't score a knockdown. There's no doubt that Hopkins and Jones are all-time great fighters, but neither were close to being one the night Joe fought them.

If you submitted a ballot without Sam Langford's name on it, but had Joe Calzaghe's name on it, you're no boxing authority or historian!

Egregious Omission/Inclusion Two--Heavyweight

Sonny Liston No -- John L. Sullivan Yes?!

John L. Sullivan? Sullivan is best known for his bareknuckle bout with Jake Kilrain, a bout Sullivan enlisted the aid of a wrestler to help him prepare for. In it, Sullivan started by tripping and hip tossing Kilrain and ultimately won in 76 rounds. In his only fight under the Marquess of Queensberry Rules, Sullivan, who weighed between 200-230 during his career, was stopped by the first sophisticated heavyweight fighter in boxing history, James J. Corbett. So basically, Sullivan, who fought once and lost during the gloved era merits inclusion on a list of the 12 greatest heavyweights ever who fought their entire career during the gloved era? Wrong! Wrong! Wrong!

Sonny Liston for one reason or another didn't make the cut. Which in my eyes suggest that those who didn't include Liston on the ballot they submitted never saw him fight or don't know what they're watching. With the exception of Joe Louis, Sonny Liston is/was the greatest boxer-puncher in heavyweight history. Sonny had dynamite in both hands. His left jab is amongst the greatest in heavyweight history, and the same thing can be said about his left hook.

Liston is also misperceived as a simplistic wrecking machine rather than the multi-dimensional fighter he was. He slipped punches, he moved his head well, he picked off shots on his elbows, and he was capable of fighting coming forward or--on those few occasions when it seemed advisable--backing up. And until he was ancient, he had a chin that never failed him (forget the nonsensical Ali knockdown; even Muhammad didn't believe it.) He's also one of the few fighters in modern times who didn't get a title shot until he was past his prime.

During the Floyd Patterson title years, Liston systematically mowed down every top heavyweight avoided by Patterson's overly protective manager Cus D'Amato. Not only did none of the world's best heavyweights beat him, not one was competitive with him. Sonny was the de facto heavyweight champion for years before he got his chance. It was a mere formality that he only needed one round to make things official.

In a bout under the Marquess of Queensberry Rules, which the other heavyweight elite on the

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list fought, Sullivan wouldn't win a round versus Liston, nor was he the fighter or put together the body of work Liston did.

Egregious Omission/Inclusion Three--Welterweight

Luis Rodriguez No -- Oscar De La Hoya Yes?!

It says here that Oscar De La Hoya deserves monumental credit for never avoiding any fighter or serious challenger. That's more than can be said for a lot of the upper-tier fighters of his era. However, with the good comes the bad, and it's two pronged. The first being that during De La Hoya's time fighting between junior lightweight and junior welterweight, he won a lot of those fights on the scales. Some may not remember, but many of the weigh-ins for those fights took place two and sometimes three days before the fight. De LaHoya being the superstar he was manipulated the system well and carried a significant weight/size advantage into those fights.

The other problem is Oscar usually came up a smidgen short when he stepped up in class. Oscar remarkably made the cut and was included among the top-10 welterweights ever. Yet the best fighter he clearly beat fighting at welterweight is Ike Quartey, and that was by one point. He won a controversial decision over Pernell Whitaker, and lost one versus Felix Trinidad. Then he ultimately lost his title to former lightweight champ Shane Mosley, who relinquished his title and moved up to welterweight totally bypassing junior welterweight. The bottom line is Oscar De La Hoya was not an all-time great fighter and in no way among the 20 greatest welterweights ever, let alone the top-10. That's based on what he brought to the ring as a fighter and the level of opposition he conclusively beat fighting as a welterweight.

Luis Rodriguez was a great fighter based on watching him fight and his record that reads like a who's who list of former champions and contenders. Rodriguez was a smooth boxer who had fast hands and was a great counter-puncher. His slashing combinations often cut and swelled up the faces of most of the opponents he fought.

Rodriguez is best known for his four fights with Hall of Famer and all-time great welterweight and middleweight champ Emile Griffith. His first bout with Griffith was a non-title bout in which he lost a split decision halting his 36 bout unbeaten streak. Three years later he won a close but unanimous decision over Griffith to capture the welterweight championship. Six months later Griffith won it back from Rodriguez via a split decision, then retained it by beating Rodriguez again by split decision in their fourth and final bout.

Based on his fights with Emile Griffith, Rodriguez surpasses De La Hoya by leaps and bounds, but there's more. Rodriguez beat Benny "Kid" Paret, Virgil Atkins, Sugar Hart, Chico Vejar, Curtis Cokes and middleweights Yama Bahama, Denny Moyer, Skeeter McClure, Holly Mims, Hurricane Carter twice, George Benton, Bennie Briscoe, Tony Mundine, and Vincente Rondon, along with Griffith, to compile a record of 107-13-1. Not to pick on De La Hoya, but how would he do fighting the likes of Griffith, Paret, Cokes, Bahama, Moyer, Mims, Carter, Benton, Briscoe, Mundine and Rondon? If you have to go to Boxrec to look up the records of these fighters to figure that out, you're no boxing authority whatsoever!

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The reality is De La Hoya would've been a non-factor fighting at welterweight during Rodriguez' era. Not only did Rodriguez meet and defeat better opposition than Oscar, he did everything asked of a fighter in the ring better. It's beyond an outrage for any so called boxing historian or authority to submit a list of all-time greatwelterweights with the name Luis Rodriguez omitted, and Oscar De La Hoya's included.

For anyone to pass a remark that the list had no glaring omissions is not just fundamentally wrong, they either don't know boxing or live in the Twilight Zone!

In Part Two I'll quickly touch on the wrongful omissions and inclusions from flyweight through heavyweight.

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