

Roy Jones - If He Keeps Fighting We'll Forget

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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Remember the night Roy Jones dazzled James Toney so completely and thoroughly that Toney looked like he was surrounded by and fighting four opponents at the same time? Since Muhammad Ali circa 1965-67, Sugar Ray Leonard and Roy Jones possessed a better skill-set and plethora of natural physical gifts greater than any other fighter that's come along. Starting with his decision win over middleweight Bernard Hopkins in May of 1993, through to his one-sided decision over heavyweight John Ruiz in March of 2003, Roy had a brilliant run.

Had Jones retired after beating Ruiz at age 34 he would've gone down as one of the top-15 pound for pound fighters/boxers in history. However, during his 10 year run Jones was often criticized for picking his spots and fighting guys who were school teachers and policemen. Although the criticism was legitimate, Roy did meet and defeat two certified all-time greats in Hopkins and Toney. A strong case can be made that in 24 rounds fighting Hopkins and Toney, Roy won at least 17 rounds against them. And when he fought John Ruiz, who was a top-5 heavyweight at the time, he didn't force Ruiz to weigh in less than he had in any other fight in his career, something he could've done. Yes, despite Ruiz being a heavyweight, he could've demanded that Ruiz who was 51 pounds heavier than any fighter he ever fought before, come in below 220, as opposed to the 226 he weighed in at.

After beating Ruiz, Jones was confronted by the best light heavyweight and rival of his title tenure, Antonio Tarver. Tarver was one light heavyweight who wasn't considered a walk-over for Jones. In a fight in which Roy struggled to make the light heavyweight limit of 175, he fought two of the gutsiest rounds of his career in rounds 11 and 12 to earn a majority decision victory. Tarver cried about the decision afterward and was given a rematch. Roy was in great shape and totally outclassed Tarver in the first round of it. Then in the second round Tarver countered a light Jones right hand with a left hook flush on the chin and knocked him out. Tarver's hook was the single best punch Roy had ever been caught with in his career and confirmed the suspicion some observers had about his chin.

Jones considered, so he said, that Tarver's punch was a fluke. In his next fight he fought Glen Johnson, who was 2-2-2 in his last six fights prior to meeting Jones. It was obvious from the first round on that Roy's confidence was shattered by Tarver's left hook as he fought glove shy the entire fight until getting knocked out by a single Johnson right hand in the ninth round. Jones was down for a while in the ring but was not seriously hurt, other than being more damaged mentally and emotionally. After not fighting for a year Jones fought a rubber match with Tarver. Well, he was in the ring with Tarver for 12 rounds but again fought to survive and not get knocked out. After the bout Jones bragged about not getting stopped and being the second best light heavyweight in the world, convincing only those needing shock-therapy that he wasn't forever damaged beyond repair due to his consecutive stoppage loses to Tarver and Johnson.

Since going through the motions in his third fight with Tarver, Jones has fought five times, going 4-1. One of those victories was a decision against undefeated Anthony Hanshaw, who was stopped by up and coming Andre Dirrell in the fifth round of his next fight. Another victory

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was a decision over former three time champ Felix Trinidad, who was taken apart by Winky Wright in his last fight three years earlier. In fact Tito only took the fight with Jones because he was convinced that he could lose every round but was never more than a single left hook away from knocking Roy out due to RJJ's unreliable chin and shaky confidence.

Roy's only stoppage win since 2002 came in his last fight against Omar Sheika, who'd lost two of his last three fights before fighting Jones and had been out of the ring for a year and a half. The best fighter Jones has fought since losing to Tarver in 2005 was undefeated former super middleweight champ Joe Calzaghe last year. In that fight Jones took the worst beating of his career. After knocking Calzaghe down in the first round, Jones tried to bluff Calzaghe into not fighting and only cut loose when he felt it was safe, which wasn't often. It was obvious to all watching the fight that Roy was basically fighting not to get stopped in the second half of the fight and looking to prove his toughness and grit to those who question it. Luckily for Jones, Calzaghe wasn't a big puncher or he would've really been hurt during the bout.

At this time Roy resembles a nicely wrapped empty package when confronting upper-tier fighters. Luckily for him his next opponent, Jeff Lacy, has been on the decline since fighting Calzaghe in 2006. In his fight with Calzaghe, Lacy was lucky not to have been stopped and probably lost 34 of the 36 minutes they shared in the ring. In Lacy's last high profile fight, a week after Jones fought Calzaghe last year, he lost a unanimous decision to his former Olympic teammate Jermain Taylor. Against Taylor, Lacy couldn't get off and even fought as if he didn't want to hurt Taylor or make him mad and possibly wake him up. And more than likely if Jeff doesn't go out of his way to bother or hurt Jones, Roy will leave him alone and be content to walk a way with the decision.

This coming Saturday night 40 year-old Jones 53-5 (39) will fight 32 year-old former IBF super middleweight title holder Jeff Lacy 25-2 (17) in Biloxi, Mississippi. The bout will be telecast via PPV for \$34.95. Maybe it says something for Jones' stature that he's still a somewhat PPV draw. Which may be a blessing in disguise, for if he loses or looks really bad, not too many will actually see it.

At one time Roy Jones was the top pound for pound fighter in boxing. However, he's 4-4 in his last eight fights and more notably, he's 0-3 versus the last three marquee fighters he's faced, Johnson, Tarver and Calzaghe. In those three bouts he barely competed.

It seems in a way Jones is fighting to try and make up for some opportunities and chances he didn't take when he was a remarkable fighter. Sadly, it's too late for that. That said, Jones was something else during his prime and from a natural talent vantage point, you're lucky to see a skill-set of that ilk more than a few times per generation. No one but Roy knows why he continues to fight. Recently he said that a loss shouldn't constitute that a fighter can no longer fight, and he's absolutely right. But it's been years since he was brilliant and almost to the point where if he just loses without getting stopped or beat up, it's a moral victory, something he wasn't about at one time.

During his prime Roy recorded a song titled, "Y'all Must've Forgot." He implied that boxing fans and writers had forgotten how spectacular he was. That wasn't the case then, but if he keeps

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fighting and losing or looking less than even par, we will forget what it was like when he always won. And that wouldn't be a good thing.

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