

## For Jermain Taylor It's A Hellish Time

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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It's over for Jermain Taylor. Having been stopped in a devastating fashion in consecutive fights in the 12th and final round by Carl Froch and Arthur Abraham will be impossible for him to overcome psychologically. His confidence and belief inside that he can win a fight over an upper-tier opponent without scoring a knockout in the first half of the bout is now shattered forever. It's like a rubber band, it can only be stretched so far, once it breaks it can't be repaired. And that's what happened to the psyche of Jermain in what was hopefully his last fight against former middleweight champion Arthur Abraham this past weekend.

When is the last time a championship caliber fighter, something Jermain is no longer capable of being mentally, came back from back-to-back knockout losses to go on to win a world title? You can't say Roy Jones. Roy has never been the same since suffering his first stoppage loss to Antonio Tarver in May of 2004 and then five months later suffering another devastating one-punch knockout defeat to Glen Johnson. It took Roy 13 months to summon the nerve to go at Tarver again. And in that fight Roy was glove-shy the entire 12-rounds and fought just enough to keep Tarver from really bothering him. In fact every time Roy thought about raising a little hell Tarver growled some to remind him what happened the last time and Jones was more than happy to just go through the motions and back off.

Boxing is as much mental as it is physical. Its history is replete with fighters who climbed into the ring with the absolute belief that they couldn't lose or be hurt. But after being taken apart for the first time it took them awhile to get back to where they were before it happened, if in fact they ever did. That said it's not uncommon to see some fighters put their first devastating loss behind them, as John Ruiz and Tommy Morrison both did after getting destroyed by David Tua and Ray Mercer.

Fighters can convince themselves that the first time was a fluke and it can't happen again. They'll blame their focus and conditioning as the reason for the setback and proceed to block it out of their mind. The problem becomes monumental emotionally for the fighter if it happens to him a second time. Once that happens the little voice in their head begins to suggest things like, "You know all that stuff that's been said and written about you not having a great chin, maybe it's true." After that the fighter begins to fight two opponents from that point on, himself and his opponent. The scary part of that is his mind will play tricks on him and he'll start sensing that not only is he not confident, but his opponent knows he harbors doubt inside and can't wait to prove him right.

If that's not enough, imagine what Jermain Taylor would have to confront psychologically if he were to fight another world class super-middleweight in a big fight, especially one who could punch a little bit. There's no way in the world he could convince himself that his chin and stamina would hold up in a fiercely contested bout. Inside he would practically be waiting for the first big shot to hurt him and start the process of thinking to himself here I go again. Having been stopped in three of his last five fights is a pattern. Fighters are no different than anyone else and are more than capable of putting on a great front for those around them. The only

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problem is they have to climb into the ring by themselves and can't hide from their fears and doubts. On top of that the fighters who face Taylor in the future will feed off his self doubt and will be even more brave and confident fighting him.

Sadly Jermain Taylor knows inside that it's not his lack of doing road work or not being focused, it's nothing more than him being who he is as a fighter. And unfortunately he's a fighter that wasn't blessed at birth with a great chin and there's nothing he or anyone else can do about that. The reality of his situation is there's no exercise or therapy, physical or mental that he can subject himself to that can change that. Although some may lie to him that he can with the thought of squeezing a few more dollars out of him...

Sure, Taylor may be able to survive Andre Ward in his next fight and perhaps those who make up his management faction will encourage him to continue. The problem with that is Taylor will be easier to stop for Ward than he was Abraham because Jermain now knows beyond all doubt that him getting knocked out is not a matter of if, but when. Even if he were to get by Ward, Taylor isn't capable of gaining a world title again and he may even be at risk of getting seriously hurt.

For the next few days Jermain will likely yell everyone to death around him insisting that he hasn't lost his confidence, but he knows deep down within, I think, that he no longer has the confidence or physical makeup to win another world title. And once that's gone it's over for a fighter. Sadly Jermain's heart will be questioned and it will be repeated by most arm-chair observers that he lost it when he was stopped by Pavlik, but they're wrong. He fought both Froch and Abraham while he was upright and tried to win the fight. Then he got caught and it was over, and that'll happen again if he continues to fight.

For Jermain Taylor it's the end of the road. He had a good career and can take solace in the fact that he ended the longest title reign in middleweight history the night he defeated Bernard Hopkins who hadn't lost a fight in 12 years. However, the wear and tear of not having any easy fights took its toll on him physically and softened him up to get knocked out. After having been knocked out in three of his last five fights, and they weren't stoppage defeats, he was badly hurt and counted out in those fights, he no longer believes it won't happen again. He now expects it to happen and for that reason alone it will.

Think about it, if you were Jermain's best friend, could you look him in the eye and say in all honesty, "Jermain, you just got caught against Abraham and that happens to all fighters. Take some time off and then get yourself in great shape for your next fight and everything will be fine?" If you can do that you're not his friend and you're lying to him just as much as he may try and lie to himself if he fights again.

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