

Chad Dawson Has To Wish It Was 1980

Written by Ron Borges

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Eddie Mustafa Muhammad fought back at a time when the talent pool in the light heavyweight division was deep and interest in boxing was too. The man he now trains, IBF champion Chad Dawson, is not so lucky, which is a burden his 57-year-old trainer is helping him shoulder.

On Saturday night Dawson, who is widely considered to be the best light heavyweight in the world, will try to expand his reputation in a rematch with former IBF title holder Glen Johnson, a man he feels he already defeated in convincing fashion a year ago; but such is the paucity of opponents at 175 pounds that Dawson is back in with him again because, frankly, the guy he wants to fight wants no part of him.

“The division’s not that deep now, like it was when I was fighting,” Muhammad said from Hartford, where the fight will be held. “I was there with (Matthew) Saad Muhammad, Michael Spinks, Victor Galindez, Marvin Johnson. What’s out there now is Chad and Bernard (Hopkins). If you throw Roy (Jones) and Joe Calzaghe (who is retired) in that’s as deep as it gets.

“Bernard and Roy are pretty much on their PF Flyers when you mention Chad Dawson to them. I understand that. Bernard is a businessman and right now the highest bidder is a fight with Roy.

“Bernard said he would fight the winner but I know how untrue that statement is. I have the young kid who is 27 and can box and can punch. Bernard wants no part of him. He wants to fight Old Roy. They don’t want to deal with what Chad brings. They don’t want anything to do with him.”

According to Muhammad, who won the WBA light heavyweight title by stopping Johnson in 1980 after losing his first challenge three years earlier against Galindez at a time when he was still known as Eddie Gregory, they are not alone in their distaste for spending much time in the ring around the undefeated Dawson (28-0, 17 KO).

Same was true for several sparring partners hired to prepare him for this fight, including world-rated Chris Henry who just stopped Shaun George in July. A week spent sparring with Dawson led to two things – a paycheck and no desire for a second one.

“I went to give him his paycheck for the week and I told him we’d see him the next day,” Muhammad said. “I came back to get him and the man had left. Chad had been hitting him with everything.”

Muhammad expects the same fate to befall Johnson (49-12-2, 33 KO) at the XL Center but perhaps more illuminating about how he feels about Dawson is that Muhammad believes were Dawson fighting when he was, nearly 30 years ago, the story might not be much different even though the competition would have been.

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“Chad would have to step up his game but he could do that,” said Muhammad, who lost his title to Spinks after two title defenses and later lost a controversial split decision to Slobodan Kacar four years later for the vacant title before retiring with a 50-8-1 record and 38 knockouts.

“Spinks would have given him some problems but it would have been a real good fight. Chad’s a better boxer than Michael. He would have outboxed Saad Muhammad or Marvin Johnson. They fought one style. Chad has many styles. He’d go to their bodies and when they had to retreat they be out of their element.”

Unfortunately for Dawson there is no such roster of potential opponents with whom he can enhance his reputation and make some money. Because of it he’s begun to consider going back to super middleweight in the hopes of getting into the mix of what is now a hot division because of SHOWTIME’s creation of the Super Six tournament to crown one universally regarded champion.

It is a frustrating time for fighters, especially ones like Dawson who believe they have been blessed with something special. While that may be true, selling it is no blessing. It’s a daunting task and maybe a curse.

In his last two outings, Dawson fought former champion Antonio Tarver in Las Vegas and the fights did not have 2,500 paying customers, according to commission records. Now he’s in Hartford without casino backing or much of a spotlight, hoping its proximity to his hometown of New Haven may at least bring in a crowd.

“The way the business is today would get anybody frustrated,” Muhammad said. “But you got to blame a lot of it on the economy. It’s not just on him. The economy is the culprit, not Chad.”

The other culprit is the usual one: the alphabet soup of sanctioning bodies that rule the sport. For a time Dawson, who is without question the best light heavyweight in the world, held both the IBF and WBC titles but he was forced to relinquish the latter, not that it matters, to fight Tarver for the biggest payday available to him.

That is boxing these days, a place where old men like Johnson are recycled as challengers while young men like Dawson seek opportunities that are not often there.

“Chad is fighting this guy because we listened to the fan reaction,” Muhammad said. “He thinks he should have won the first fight even though he only won about three rounds and lost the decision in his hometown so, fine with us.

“Chad is two years smarter. He’s two years stronger. And Glen is two years older. Chad is going to make him use those old legs. He’s going to beat him up. Last couple fights I saw a decline in Glen Johnson. Saturday night you’re going to see a precipitous decline.

“Chad can really box and he’s got a little crack with that right hook now that he’s sitting down on his punches more. I got him to turn over that right hand. When he does that and starts going to the body it’s a whole different scenario. Chad will keep him spinning like a top and running into

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punches.”

In the process, he'd also love to run into a future opponent worthy of the title, someone the public would buy to see him fight. That will not be, Muhammad believes, Bernard Hopkins but what he's hoping is that maybe Calzaghe will get the itch one more time.

“If Calzaghe comes out of retirement that's a big fight in Wales (Calzaghe's home),” Muhammad said. “We got no problem going over to his hometown. I did that all the time. If you believe in your ability as a fighter you have nothing to worry about.

“That ring is both guys' hometowns. It's up to you to dominate. That's what Chad is doing.”