

Heart Is Often Code For No Technique

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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Evander Holyfield once said to me that heart and toughness is not just taking a beating and not quitting. It's battling through adversity and finding a way to win. It takes more to fight back in trying to win than just enduring a beating and losing with honor and supposed dignity.

Nuts and guts will take a fighter so far, but it's nowhere near enough to make it to the top. What happens when the fighter with toughness and heart meets a fighter with toughness, heart, technique and skill? What most miss is that skilled fighters are just as tough as the "Rocky Balboa" types, they just don't wear it on their shoulder. Because a truly world class fighter usually wins with his technique and skill. His toughness and heart is usually only challenged when he's confronted by a fighter as good as him, then it comes down to nuts and guts and stamina.

Ray Mancini's heart and toughness got him past Arturo Frias and Deuk Koo Kim, but only held up for about 10 rounds versus Alexis Arguello and Livingstone Bramble. Ron Stander's toughness was something that elevated him leading up to his title shot versus Joe Frazier. The difference in the fight was Joe was every bit as tough as Ron, only he could fight his ass off.

Is it possible to be tougher than George Chuvalo or Randall "Tex" Cobb? Yep. If you're Muhammad Ali and Larry Holmes - and are world class skilled and tough. Vito Antuofermo and Mustafa Hamsho were as tough as a fighter could be. However, they found while fighting Marvin Hagler that he could really fight. Oh, he was also as tough as they were.

Toughness and heart are a foundation for all fighters. If a fighter has neither, he'll never make it at any level in amateur or professional boxing in most cases.

When a fighters' heart and toughness are his calling card that means there's not a whole lot else to say about him. What's also a red flag is when how hard a fighter hits is his calling card. All fighters can hit up to a certain level. The problem is the greatest punchers in boxing history have never knocked out everyone they fought. Nobody who knows what they're talking about can question the authenticity of Mike Tyson's two handed power. What happened when he didn't score an early round KO? He either lost or struggled to win. When that big punch landed and his opponent said, "Now what?" Tyson was like, "Now what, what?"

What most often miss is there are some four round pros who are tougher mentally and physically than superstars and greats like Mike Tyson and Roy Jones. They're just not as skilled nor can they fight at the world class level. And the same applies to fighters who were just below being considered outstanding.

If I asked a group of fans or writers who was tougher, John Ruiz or Mike Tyson, or Tommy Morrison and Tyson, most would laugh and think it was a stupid question and that it was a no brainer - retorting back that Tyson was tougher than Ruiz and Morrison. However, they'd be wrong.

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If you need proof, just look at how Tyson came undone when he was challenged and faced adversity. He never came back to win a fight he was either down in or was losing. Once he saw he couldn't win he looked for a way out or stopped fighting. On the other hand Ruiz suffered one of the most devastating defeats in boxing history at the hands of David Tua, yet never showed trepidation in the ring in his subsequent fights after that. Words aren't enough of a testament as to what that says about Ruiz's toughness and character.

The same thing applies to Tommy Morrison. Everybody remembers the frightening way in which Ray Mercer destroyed him, and like Ruiz, Tommy never fought glove-shy or as if he didn't want to get hit in his fights after Mercer (not even against Foreman - he smartly moved away and boxed George). Something Roy Jones can't say after he was knocked out by Antonio Tarver in their rematch. After getting stopped by Tarver, Roy wouldn't let his hands go against Glen Johnson in his next bout fearing he'd open himself up to getting caught with something big, as he eventually did and was counted out.

When Roy met Tarver in their rubber match he didn't fight, he did all he could to keep Tarver from knocking him out again. It just so happened that Tarver wasn't interested in stopping Jones and was content being the bully during the fight knowing every time he growled Roy would back off. After the fight Jones bragged about being the second best light heavyweight in the world and not getting knocked out. Which goes to show just how far Roy fell psychologically from getting whacked on the chin with one over-hand left from Tarver.

On the flip side, Jose Luis Castillo (not necessarily a great fighter) was stopped by the late Diego Corrales in the 10th round of their first bout in a devastating fashion. But his confidence and psyche wasn't shook and he had no reservation whatsoever going after Corrales in the rematch and won by stoppage.

All fighters are tough, but toughness isn't enough to make it to the top in professional boxing. And punching power isn't the be-all end-all because there's never been a fighter who has knocked out or stopped every opponent they faced. You better know how to fight even at the prelim and four round level.

Nuts and nuts will take a fighter further than anything else, but it's not enough. It requires nuts/guts and skill along with a fighting aptitude and boxing IQ.

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