

Why Hopkins And Jones Can Be Better Tonight Than They Were In 1993

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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Bernard Hopkins 50-5-1 (32) is 45, and his opponent tonight Roy Jones 54-6 (40) is 41. Since their rematch has been announced it has been derided and criticized by most fans and the media. Tonight's fight was also excoriated in this space, but it's really not out of the question that it could be a decent bout and better than their first civilized scrap 17 years ago. This is something that would be a welcome surprise to all boxing fans.

Some of the same things being said about Hopkins-Jones II were said about the third meeting between heavyweight champ Muhammad Ali, 33, and former champ "Smokin" Joe Frazier, 31, back in 1975. Today the fight is considered the greatest and most fiercely contested heavyweight championship bout in boxing history. It's now referred to as the "Thrilla In Manila." When former greats Sugar Ray Leonard, 33, and Thomas "The Hitman" Hearns, 31, fought a rematch at super-middleweight eight years after the classic they delivered the first time they met for the undisputed welterweight title, nobody complained about having to pay to see it the next day, nobody.

Granted, Hopkins and Jones when they were at their peak never delivered fights as exciting or brutal as the ones we saw from Ali, Frazier, Leonard and Hearns when they were on the big stage and the world was watching. And for that reason both Hopkins and Jones have more left at a later stage of their career than the four of them did. Actually - they'd have to try to not put on a better fight than the one we saw from them back in 1993, when Jones won eight of the twelve rounds they fought and walked away with a 116-112 unanimous decision victory over Hopkins.

When Bernard and Roy met in 1993, Jones was the talk of the boxing world and being touted as the next Sugar Ray Leonard. Hopkins was four years removed from a 56 month prison stint and hadn't tapped into his potential and was still trying to find himself as a fighter. Roy fought to maintain his status and didn't take any real shots trying to separate himself from Hopkins, thus he did what he had to in order to secure the win and remain undefeated. As for Hopkins, he didn't possess the confidence and know-how to go after Jones - therefore he never fully committed to trying to win the fight. When all was said and done the fight was a dud and both fighters saved face and went on to prosper financially and professionally.

Most fans are worried for Roy's health and safety tonight. But Hopkins has never been a catch-and-kill style fighter, something he'll have to be tonight. Nor has he scored a stoppage win since he knocked out Oscar De La Hoya with a body shot back in September of 2004.

Tonight when Hopkins and Jones meet, they have nothing to protect. Both are first ballot hall of famers and will go down as all-time greats. Hopkins can't lose this one to Roy, and knows his style doesn't bode well for him to win a decision over him. So, as he's said, he has to go after Jones and try to make it a street fight. On Jones' behalf, he has nothing to lose - and would love to be the first fighter to stop Hopkins. Roy is very confident fighting Bernard and even if he loses tonight, he'd still be 1-1 in their head-to-head matchup. If he wins it'll kill Hopkins psychologically

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along with restoring a little of the lost glow to his great career. And doing that at Hopkins expense would make it that much sweeter for Jones.

Hopkins has been fighting with house money since he won the light heavyweight title from Antonio Tarver. Beating Jones settles an unpaid debt that he feels is long overdue. And if he wins he'll lobby for a fight with the Hays-Ruiz winner and try to capture a piece of the heavyweight title in an attempt to add to his legacy with no risk attached to it. Jones was the second former middleweight champ in history to capture a piece of the heavyweight title. He'd love nothing more than to make sure Hopkins never joins him on that short list. To guarantee that he must defeat him tonight. And the fact is that he's gone on record saying if he can't beat Hopkins or gets knocked out by him he'll realize that he's finished and has to retire. Not to mention being retired by Hopkins is probably the worst way for Roy to leave boxing.

The fight has to be better this time:

Hopkins has to make it a fight or he loses. If Hopkins doesn't bring it, it's likely he will. And if he brings it, Roy can't prevent that nor does he possess the legs to get away. Then Jones will have no choice but to fight and trade with Hopkins. If that happens, it comes down to who has the better chin. That favors Hopkins, but it's not like Bernard can just touch Roy and knock him out, he's not that kind of a puncher. And the thing that makes it intriguing tonight is, Hopkins gains nothing by winning a dull decision - he has to stop Jones to really even the score. In fact Bernard may even have to give Roy a few free shots just to open him up with the hope of getting Jones to exchange with him. So the makings for a decent fight do exist.

No, we won't see a mini "Thrilla In Manila" tonight, and it's doubtful that we'll see Leonard-Hearns II. But there's a good chance due to the style clash and what's on the line for both Hopkins and Jones, they'll cut loose and deliver a better fight than they did 17 years ago, something they're still capable of doing even at ages 45 and 41.