

No Classic: Hopkins Gets UD Win In A Chippy Snoozer Over Jones

Written by Michael Woods

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Rarely has less been expected from two fistic legends facing off. Going in to Saturday night, fight fans still saw Bernard Hopkins as a legit pound for pound threat, based as much on his guile as anything else, but coming into main event at the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas, Roy Jones was seen as a severely faded shell of the dazzling showman of the 1990s, one step from totally shot after being blasted out by Danny Green last year.

Fans of the two future Hall of Famers could only hope that both would revert back to fine form of yesteryear, and somehow justify the stiff \$50 PPV charge. Cynics suspected that the men wouldn't deign to get down and dirty, put themselves in harms way, and take risks in order to attempt to do real damage to their foe. Some feared we'd see two seniors shuffling their way through a pricy sparring session, lessening their legacies as we inevitably compared them to their selves from 17 years ago, when Jones schooled the relatively green Hopkins.

Sad to say, the cynics were right. They'll argue that they are actually realists, not cynics. On this evening, cynics, realists, whatever, if you tuned in to this rematch, you couldn't have been overjoyed. Not unless you liked seeing Hopkins on the mat several times, after absorbing rabbit punches and low blows. Not unless you like seeing Jones posing, his face a cocky mask of certitude, and throwing a punch in anger once every minute or so. Not unless you prize the art of the clinch as your favored fistic maneuver. But..Someone had to win, and since we know it wasn't the fan, that leaves Hopkins or Jones. After twelve rounds of pricy sparring, it was Hopkins who had his hand raised, by scores of 117-110, 117-110, 118-109. Jones took the loss, but of course it was the fight fans who gave in to temptation, and the fighters' solid marketing job, who probably most rue the time spent.

Bottom line: both men still have something left. Jones can still get it done against Omar Sheika types. Hopkins can still play the spoiler, and get his hand raised against many a young gun who possess half the fistic knowledge he possesses. But these two guys should not have been matched up again, certainly not in a pay-per-view setting. The sport did itself no favors on this evening.

Hopkins (age 45; from Philly;) was 175 pounds, Jones (age 41; from Florida;) was also 175 pounds, after removing his underwear on the scale on Friday.

Looked like the cynics would be proven sagacious in the first; both men were cautious, but Hopkins was the busier man. Was Jones simply too gunshy from the Green rubout to commit to any meaningful offense? Hopkins is a master at smothering, tying the foe up after he's done doing what he wants to do. Lord..what if John Ruiz had beaten Haye and Hopkins beat Jones, and Hopkins fought Ruiz? I shudder..

Jones held both hands high, palms out, looking like defense was his first order of business. Through four rounds, the cynics were looking likes sages. No matter what Hopkins and Jones had growled in their pre-fight hype-o-rama, both men reverted to recent form: Hopkins was

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punch-punch-grab, Jones was feint, feint, feint, ponder throwing, maybe throw...

Jones didn't want to wear out his legs, so he let Hopkins bang him to the body quite a bit. RJJ did seem to get warmed up in the fifth. But Hopkins scored the best with a groin shot as he knew the ref was out of position. Too often, the fight was in no man's land--neither man really craving a position of assertiveness. Hopkins played that part more though. Jones banged Hopkins on the back of the head, as Hopkins was twisted around, and Hopkins was on the canvas. The doctor came in and examined him...we wondered if Hopkins was playing, but I'd guess no. He didn't need a breather and was likely ahead on the cards. The replay looked like it was a cuff, but who knows, really. The ref took a point from Jones, and then asked Hopkins if he wanted to continue. Hopkins came out blasting, and the men brawled after the bell. Cornermen came into the ring after, and order needed to be restored.

The ref told both to be classy before the seventh. They were. Too much so. Both men conserved energy, but Hopkins less so. In the eighth, Hopkins pressed the pace, such as it was. Jones posed and preened, and then hit Hopkins behind the head. This time it was a little right hand in a clinch, but this time came after Hopkins threw his own rabbit punch. Again, Hopkins hit the deck, grabbed his head, and chewed up the scenery. Ref Tony Weeks said both of the fighters were dirty and took no points. In the ninth, Jones was more aggressive, but not really any more effective. His handspeed is still OK, but he doesn't throw with leverage, for fear of being caught by a counter. Hopkins moved more, responding to Jones' urgency; it looked like Jones knew the cards could be looking ugly. Boos were heard after the ninth. In the tenth, Hopkins got caught with a low blow. He went to the mat, looking agonized. Once again, Hopkins took an extra measure of time to compose himself.

In the 11th, an accidental butt opened a slice on Jones' left eyelid. The 12th looked much like the other 11 rounds, no need to waste space on a lengthy dissection. The applause at the final bell were tepid.

SPEEDBAG After, Hopkins said he was seeing spots from the rabbit punches. He labeled the fight a good fight. "I want David Haye, I want the heavyweight championship of the world," he said. Jones called it a "great fight," with a straight face, adding insult to injury. He said he'll consider keeping on fighting, after talking to his team.

---Please tell me these guys won't lobby for a tiebreaker!

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