He won a bronze medal fighting as a light heavyweight at the 1984 Olympic games due to a controversial DQ in the semifinal against Kevin Barry of New Zealand. But everyone who watched the boxing competition knew Evander Holyfield was the best light heavyweight at the Games and saw that he was a pretty sure can't miss prospect as a pro campaigning as a light heavyweight and/or cruiserweight. Holyfield exceeded expectation and is not only an all-time great heavyweight, he's hands down the greatest cruiserweight champion in history.

It's not a reach to envision some disagreeing with the suggestion that Holyfield is one of the all-time heavyweight greats. However, based on who they fought and what they look like on film, along with who Holyfield fought and the result when he was at his best, it's hard to think Evander would be in so far over his head against the likes of Jack Johnson, Jack Dempsey, Gene Tunney, Ezzard Charles, "Jersey" Joe Walcott and Rocky Marciano.

When Evander was at his peak fighting as heavyweight circa 1989-93, he was as tough and versatile as any heavyweight you'll see. What gets lost in the translation in regards to Holyfield is, he didn't do any one thing particularly great. But he did everything really well and when he wanted to make his opponent miss and chose not to go to war with them, he could box and was hard to hit with follow up shots if he didn't slip his opponents' lead punch. And when it comes to the level of opposition he faced, only Muhammad Ali can lay claim to having faced a better grade of fighter from top to bottom.

Only the undefeated Riddick Bowe beat Holyfield while he was at his best, and Bowe never looked that great again for the rest of his career. Ask yourself how many heavyweights get the "W" over the Bowe of the first Holyfield bout? And Evander did beat Bowe in the rematch by completely changing his style as he fought in retreat and boxed. He was seconds away from stopping Riddick before he was stopped on a night that he looked as if his body was breaking down literally during their rubber match.

If you're not convinced Evander Holyfield was the great fighter I consider him to be when he was at his physical best as a heavyweight, this is not an attempt to do so. Nobody is ever convinced or changes their mind based on an article or what someone else says. But if you're a real boxing fan and know what you're watching - it's impossible to refute that 1) he was a special fighter and 2) he hasn't looked like the special fighter he once was since he knocked out Michael Moorer in their November 1997 rematch. Yes, it's almost 13 years since Holyfield has resembled anything close to being the fighter he was during his prime.

Evander is 6-6-1 this decade. Today, Holyfield, age 47, 42-10-2 (27) will fight Frans Botha 47-4-3 (28), who hasn't been a factor in the division since 1995-96, for the World Boxing Federation title. Which sounds more like a regional WWE title than it does one worthy of a former all-time great boxing champion. Forget about whether or not if you think Evander is going to win or lose. The question is - does it matter? And the answer to that is of course not. Although Holyfield insists he can become the heavyweight champion again, and that's all that

really matters, the fact is it would take a miracle like none we've ever seen in sports for him to accomplish that.

Regardless of the outcome of Holyfield-Botha, Evander has already suffered double-digit loses. And sadly that'll be what stands out when boxing enthusiast look at his won-loss record fifty years from now. The first thing they'll notice is he went over eight years and counting since he's won a significant fight (Hasim Rahman 2002), something that will still be in play even if he gets by Botha. Trying to convince future fans how terrific Holyfield was in his prime is like trying to convince younger fans today how special and great fighters like Ezzard Charles and Emile Griffith were during their prime. And the reason for that is younger fans tend to look at the won-loss record and figure how great could fighters like Charles and Griffith have been since they lost x-amount of times. Only for Holyfield it's worse. Charles and Griffith fought over one-hundred times, as opposed to Holyfield who is about to fight for the fifty-fifth time.

Evander Holyfield was a small heavyweight who wasn't a runner and because his fights went long against the bigger heavyweights of his era, there was a lot of wear and tear on him physically. For the first four or five years of his tenure fighting as a heavyweight he would've been 10-miles of bad road for some of the greatest of the greats, with the exception of a few. However, he's been slightly over a .500 fighter for more than a decade and it's hard to remember what it was like when he always won during the first decade of his career.

As of this writing I'd take the version of Holyfield who fought Buster Douglas, George Foreman and Bowe I over any version of Lennox Lewis. And based on their two fights in 1999 when Holyfield was at least two years into his decline, I stand firm on that. Remember, Holyfield had no respect for Lewis going into their first fight and uncharacteristically predicted a third round knockout win. Evander fought without a sense of urgency during the fight and received one of the biggest gift decisions in boxing history when the fight was scored a draw. Eight months later a more focused but 37 year-old Holyfield fought like he had an interest in the outcome and lost a close decision to Lewis, (I had it 115-113 Lewis). That said - Holyfield walked right through Lewis's right hands and uppercuts and forced Lennox to box and hold more than attack and fight. Holyfield was never hurt or in trouble during the bout. At the time when they fought, Holyfield was only capable of getting off three or four complete rounds of a 12-round fight. During the other eight rounds he'd fight in spurts and try to steal rounds and he almost beat Lewis fighting like that.

Lennox Lewis retired a few months after beating Vitali Klitschko seven years ago. Since then, Holyfield has gone 4-4. As time goes by the legacy of Lennox Lewis continues to grow, and like Larry Holmes, history recognizes just how special and great he was. On the other hand Holyfield is making it harder and harder to remember how great he was. And with everything being recorded in one form or another -- there will be more less flattering images and film of him fighting than there will be of him when he was one of the baddest and toughest fighters in boxing.

Those of us who saw him when he was really special will be trying to convince future generations of boxing fans not to judge his greatness based on what he did post 1997. With each loss he compiles now that argument will become tougher and tougher to make. Pretty

soon it'll be impossible to convince those who never saw Holyfield and Lewis while they were at the top of the heavyweight division that they really were near equals.

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