

This Week It's James Toney

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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Mesi is the man to beat in the heavyweight division. Toney will beat Tyson if they fight. Sound familiar? These are the overreactions and the after thoughts and remarks following the past two weekends major fights. A week ago heavyweight Joe Mesi jumped on 35 year old DaVarryl Williamson, stopping him in the first round. This past weekend, heavyweight James Toney, yes he is a heavyweight, stopped a shell of a fighter named Evander Holyfield in the 9th round. Last week many were saying Mesi was the new star in the heavyweight division. This week Toney has knocked Mesi off his high perch of ONE WEEK, and now he's the excitement and future of the heavyweights? Why do so many base so much off of one fight?

I remember after Buster Douglas knocked out Mike Tyson, and was getting ready to fight Evander Holyfield, I had a conversation with famed boxing historian Bert Sugar, who I love to argue with. We were talking about the upcoming heavyweight title fight between Douglas and Holyfield. I remember I asked him who he liked in the fight and he said, Douglas. I said no way, Holyfield will take Douglas apart.

I then said to him, Bert, if Douglas never fought Tyson, who would you pick? He said Holyfield. I said you mean to tell me that you're basing everything off of Douglas beating Tyson, and he said yep. I said there is no way I can give Douglas the benefit over Holyfield based on one fight. I continued saying that Douglas doesn't match up with Holyfield like he did Tyson. History went on to prove that everything that worked against Tyson, didn't work against Holyfield. Granted, Douglas wasn't in the same shape for Holyfield that he was for Tyson, but Holyfield would have beat any version of Douglas.

I know Toney has had a long career with a proven record against quality opposition. However, I need to see him in with a live heavyweight, opposed to beating a heavy bag with muscles, which is all that Holyfield is right now. Last week it was Mesi, this week it's Toney.

Let me make one thing perfectly clear. I think James Toney is a great fighter. So don't say I'm not giving him his due praise for fighting a good fight versus Holyfield. Secondly, Toney is a legitimate heavyweight of 217 pounds, who hasn't fought at 160 for close to 10 years. I've read where some have said that Holyfield was beaten by a middleweight. That is totally asinine for anyone to try and infer that Holyfield was beaten by a middleweight. Toney is a more legitimate heavyweight than either Chris Byrd or Roy Jones.

No doubt, Toney's skills, chin, and boxing ability are unquestioned. His performance versus Holyfield was absolutely brilliant, and he should receive all due praise for it. However, let's not forget the version of Holyfield that it came against. The Evander Holyfield who Toney fought wasn't even 80% of the fighter that Chris Byrd beat 10 months ago. Holyfield had literally nothing against Toney. Again, Toney helped him look shot, but there were other factors at play besides Toney.

Evander Holyfield in his prime, 1990-1993, was an all-time great in my opinion. That being said,

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he hasn't been anything close to resembling a great fighter since he stopped Michael Moorer in November of 1997, six years and nine fights ago, excluding his bout versus Toney. Since beating Moorer, Holyfield has looked lethargic and washed up in everyone of his fights except for his fight against Rahman. Anyone who would try and dispute this hasn't been watching with their eyes open!

Holyfield displayed so many characteristics of a shot fighter against Toney, it's not even funny. First off, he had no bounce or spring in his legs. He had no reflexes or reaction. He was wild at times, and couldn't even take advantage of a stationary Toney when he wasn't punching. Does Toney deserve credit for Holyfield not being able to get off while he's doing nothing to prevent him from doing so? I don't think so. Not being able to get off is one of the most common liabilities that a shot fighter exhibits. It was obvious that Holyfield had to think about everything he wanted to do, nothing was instinctive. Another sure sign of a shot fighter. Toney simply pot-shoted Holyfield with nothing more than a basic one-two, and landed every time.

Holyfield exhibited the speed of a Sun-Dial. He had no stamina and winced when he got hit, something Lewis and Tyson never made him do. If that isn't undeniable proof of him being an empty package, I don't know what is? Against Toney, Holyfield looked like Joe Louis versus Ezzard Charles, or Muhammad Ali against Larry Holmes. He would've been whacked around by any top heavyweight in the world the night he fought Toney. He was that bad. In fact he looked awful warming up in his dressing room prior to the fight, just as 41 year old Sugar Ray Leonard did before fighting Hector Camacho!

Now that Toney has beat Holyfield, there seems to be a ground swell favoring him over many of the upper-tier heavyweights in the world. I look at it another way. As good as Toney was against Holyfield, think how bad Holyfield would have been beaten by Lewis, either Klitschko, Tua, Sanders, Jones, Byrd, and even Tyson.

I repeat, I think James Toney is a great fighter. He may even go on to win a piece of the heavyweight title. However, at this time I'm not ready to start praising him endlessly declaring he is the new force in the heavyweight division. I need to see him beat more than a former great who looked out of sync shadow boxing.