

Upon Further Review: Jones Beat Tarver

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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After watching the Roy Jones-Antonio Tarver fight a second time, it reconfirms what I thought after watching it live. Jones won. Although Tarver put up a good fight, and beat Jones up more than he was beaten up by Jones at certain points, there can be no case made for Tarver. As long as boxing is scored by the round, Jones was the winner.

What Antonio Tarver did was fight in spurts and won some rounds solidly over Jones. However, there were no 2-point rounds in favor of either fighter. The bottom line is, Tarver didn't let his hands go enough and just followed Jones around the ring. While Tarver was following Jones, Jones' was scoring and fighting more effectively. Tarver let too many crucial rounds slide by without taking charge. The rounds that Tarver wasn't assertive, Jones won.

I had the fight 5-5 in rounds at the end of the 10th. All anyone has to do is listen to Buddy McGirt's instruction to Tarver between the 11th and 12th rounds. He emphatically implored Tarver to go out and throw punches and finish the fight. Believe me, in most scenarios, a fighters corner has the correct pulse of the fight.

McGirt knew that by Tarver not being busy enough, he was leaving the door open for Jones to pull the fight out. And that's exactly what happened. Just to make it clear. Jones didn't take Tarver apart, as I expected, but going by rounds, Jones won more than Tarver did.

To those who have read any of my past writings on Jones, you know that I've been one of his staunchest critics. That being said, I must admit that Jones won me over more in his fight versus Tarver than he had in any other fight in his career. Jones showed against Tarver that he is made of some of the same stuff as some of the past all-time greats. On a night when he was not at his best physically, he won with his heart and determination. He also demonstrated another characteristic, only exhibited by the greats.

What Jones did was get inside of Tarver's head. What he did was bluff Tarver. He convinced Tarver that it was unsafe to pressure him and take chances down the stretch. This is something that Robinson, Ali, Leonard, and Holmes did in a couple fights in their career when they weren't on top of their game down the stretch of a close fight.

This is what Jones did in the last two rounds that enabled him to at least score a little and kept Tarver from taking over the round. It wasn't that Jones was so spectacular, it's just that he conned Tarver into not really going for it when the fight was on the line. And I'm not talking about the judge's scorecards, they were way out in left field as usual. I'm talking about the scorecard of the fans watching the fight. Most of them had the fight pretty close to even after the tenth round.

Another thing Jones did in this fight was prove that he could take it. Tarver hit Jones with some big shots to the body and Jones never seemed bothered in the least. He also caught Jones to the head with a few good shots and Jones never really seemed shook or in trouble. I know that

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Tarver has nothing in his arsenal close to Foster's left hook, or the Spinks' Jinx. Never the less, Tarver is an adequate puncher and Jones was never hurt. Only frustrated and slightly overwhelmed in certain spots, but never close to going down or out.

Toughness is something I have questioned about Jones for sometime. In his fight versus Tarver he showed me he was tough. Not Matthew Saad Muhammad tough, but tough enough to hold his own with some of the past greats. I never doubted his skill, I knew it was there. It's just that I knew he would need more than his speed and skill had he crossed paths with the likes of some of the best fighters who ever campaigned at 175.

Now that Jones has been forced to show what he is made of, I have no doubt that he is in the league with the best of the best of those who held the light heavyweight crown. I'll wait until he is retired before trying to place him historically, but he definitely must be mentioned among the greats at 175. I won't rank him now because he can still go on to accomplish more, which would move him higher in the overall pantheon of light heavyweight greats.

At this time, in my opinion, he is one of the five greatest light heavyweights of the last 50 years. Along with Archie Moore, Bob Foster, Michael Spinks, and Dwight Muhammad Qawi.