

15 Rounds: The True Championship Distance

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Sunday, 16 November 2003 18:00

Do most hard-core boxing fans miss the 15 round championship bouts, or is it just me? Most of the modern day boxing history was made during the era of the 15 round championship distance fights. In fact, a portion of Joe Louis' title defenses were scheduled for 20 rounds.

Not since the rematch between Larry Holmes and Michael Spinks in April of 1986 has a heavyweight title fight gone or been scheduled for 15 rounds. I don't care what anyone says, 15 rounds separates the champions and contenders. To this day, I don't think anyone knows for sure the real reason for the title fight distance being shortened to 12 rounds.

Some have said it was for safety reasons and protecting the fighters. The fight that is highlighted as the reason for the 12 round distance is the 1982 WBA lightweight championship between champ Ray Mancini and challenger Du Ku Kim. In that fight, which was a war, Kim was knocked out in the 14th round. The Mancini-Kim fight was a non stop toe-to-toe brawl. The bout ended when Mancini landed a devastating right hand to Kim's head. Kim never recovered and was pronounced dead shortly after leaving the ring on a stretcher.

The Mancini-Kim fight followed the jr. welterweight title fight between Aaron Pryor and Alexis Arguello the night before. The Pryor-Arguello fight ended in the 14th round with Pryor stopping Arguello with a barrage of devastating bombs. Although Arguello took a terrible beating, he recovered and even went on to fight Pryor again 10 months later. The thought that arose after these fights was that fighters lose too much fluid around the brain in the last five rounds and become more at risk for head injuries.

Has anyone noticed that most of the fighters who have died in the ring have been below 150 pounds. When is the last time a heavyweight died due to injuries suffered in a fight. The last one I can think of is Sonny Banks. Banks is best known for being the first fighter to drop Cassius Clay, early in Clay's career in 1962. Banks died shortly after being knocked out by Leotis Martin in their 1964 fight. If another heavyweight has died as a result of injuries sustained in a fight, I can't recall who it was.

In my opinion, the reason that you hardly ever see fatalities in the heavyweight division is because the big guys don't have to make weight. In many cases, fighters under 150 pounds dehydrate themselves shedding those last few pounds to make weight. This leaves them vulnerable to brain injuries with a lack of fluid around their skull protecting the brain from crashing against it when they are hit. I believe this is more of a danger than fighters fighting 15 rounds. If I'm wrong, someone please explain why we rarely see heavyweights being killed in the ring? You would think most boxing fatalities would occur in the heavyweight division since they are clearly the most powerful punchers.

Another reason that was given for making title fights 12 rounds instead of 15 was so they could broadcast them on network television. What a joke! Network boxing doesn't even exist. It's either cable, satellite, or pay per view.

15 Rounds: The True Championship Distance

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Sunday, 16 November 2003 18:00

I have long felt that the 12 round distance is inept. Any 10 round fighter can fight 12 rounds. However, not every 10 round fighter can fight 15 rounds. Shouldn't there be a border separating the men from the boys? The champion should be a special fighter. Conditioning and stamina should be part of his make up. In my years of following boxing, I've always felt that it took a special fighter to train and pace himself for the real championship distance. A fighter doesn't have to be anything special to fight and prepare for 12 rounds. Not since they all can do it.

The questions that abound from looking back at history if certain fights were scheduled for 12 rounds instead of 15 are very intriguing. And the same goes for if some title fights had been scheduled for 15 rounds instead of 12.

In 1941, heavyweight champ Joe Louis was slightly behind in his title defense versus light heavyweight champ Billy Conn. The fight ended when Louis caught Conn with a devastating six punch barrage knocking him out in the 13th round. What if that fight is only 12 rounds? The longest title reign in heavyweight history is shortened to four years instead of just under 12. Some may say if the fight was scheduled for 12 rounds instead of 15, Louis would have went after Conn sooner. I say it's easier to stay away and move for 12 rounds than it is 15.

Rocky Marciano is the only undefeated heavyweight champion in history. However, in Marciano's title winning effort against Champion Jersey Joe Walcott, he was trailing on all three scorecards 7-4-1, 7-5, and 8-4 after the 12th round. In round 13 Marciano knocked out Walcott with one of histories best right hands. In this fight, it took Marciano 13 rounds to get Walcott in position to land that right hand. Had this fight been only 12 rounds, Marciano loses the decision. Thus we would've been cheated out of one of the greatest punches ever thrown in boxing history. Not to mention the only perfect career in heavyweight history.

In the biggest and most anticipated fight in welterweight history, Sugar Ray Leonard trailed Thomas Hearns in the scoring after 12 rounds before rallying to stop him in the 14th round. Some say Frazier didn't seal his victory over Ali until he dropped him with one of histories greatest left-hooks ever thrown in the 15th round of their first fight. There are many other fights that would've altered history had they been scheduled for 12 rounds instead of 15. Too many to mention in this space.

The other side of this debate is, how would some recent fights have turned out if they were scheduled for 15 rounds instead of 12. Wouldn't it have been something to see if the De La Hoya-Mosley rematch had three more rounds. Although I scored the fight 7-5 De La Hoya, Mosley was surely coming on in the last rounds. It's not out of the question that Mosley may have stopped De La Hoya, thus ending any scoring controversy.

Another De La Hoya fight that could've ended in a knockout, is his fight versus Felix Trinidad. I had the fight 7-5 De La Hoya, and felt that he definitely should have been declared the winner. However, like in the Mosley fight, Trinidad was coming on. It's not out of the question that Trinidad may have stopped De La Hoya in the last three rounds if it was scheduled for 15. Had the fight been 15 rounds I doubt that there would have been any controversy in regard to the decision.

15 Rounds: The True Championship Distance

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Sunday, 16 November 2003 18:00

Just last week we saw a dead tired Roy Jones pull out a hard fought decision over Antonio Tarver in the 11th and 12th rounds. At the end of the 12th round, Jones was clearly more spent than Tarver. Who knows how it would've turned out had there been three more rounds? Maybe Jones runs out of gas and gets stopped. Who knows, but I for one would have loved to see it play out.

Let's go back to 15 rounds. I've heard it argued that today's fighters are bigger and stronger along with being better conditioned than those of previous generations. I'm not sure I agree with all of that, but if it is so, lets test them over the course of the real championship distance. 15 Rounds!

Bringing back 15 round title fights is just one of the reforms I'd like to see boxing under go. Having one governing sanctioning body is another. And I'd love to see boxing brought back to network TV again. Wouldn't that be great? If you really think about it, there is only one reason why these reforms have no shot at ever being implemented?