

A White Heavyweight Contender: So What

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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Now that Joe Mesi has scored an impressive knockout in his HBO debut, look out! The HBO-Mesi relationship is about to begin. Muhammad Ali had a saying about Jerry Quarry and Duane Bobick in the early 1970's, who were the main white heavyweight contenders during that era. It went something like this when referring to Quarry and Bobick, "They Have The Complexion and The Connection To Get The Protection!" No doubt that HBO see's the market out there for a white heavyweight contender. Just for the record there hasn't been a white American Heavyweight Champion since Rocky Marciano in 1952-1955!

Obviously, all fighters should be judged strictly on their skills and accomplishments. That's how I see it and how I evaluate fighters. The funny thing is that some say I shouldn't have mentioned that HBO was going to look to capitalize on Mesi being white. Well if that's the case, how come every article or message board I've read compares Mesi to Cooney and Morrison. How come not Foreman or Tyson? All four of them made their mark as punchers, yet Mesi has only been mentioned with the likes of Cooney and Morrison.

It's impossible to ignore that race will play a major factor in the marketing of Joe Mesi. You can bet your life that the media and HBO will be playing up the fact that Rocky Marciano is his idol. And that both he and Marciano are from Blue-Collar towns. This is manly because legitimate white heavyweight contenders have been few and far between since the heyday of Marciano back in the 50's. This makes him unique. The fact that he can hit also adds to his mystique.

The term White-Hope is so misleading today, and I hate it. The days of Jack Johnson are 100 years behind us. There isn't a ground swell today calling for a white heavyweight to win the title. The only thing that brings the attention to a white heavyweight contender is that most want to see if he can be the one to do something that hasn't happened since 1952. Let's be honest, a bonafied white heavyweight contender is good for boxing. The Black fighters want to fight the white fighters because they represent the most money. And this is good for all fighters. In evaluating Joe Mesi the fighter, let's do it based on what we have seen from him in the ring. Forget the names Cooney, Morrison, Foreman, and Tyson.

First of all we know Mesi is a puncher. He has shown two handed power in both his right hand and his left hook. He also throws a lot of punches and has pretty good hand speed. I know some have raved about his hand speed, however I don't think it's quite as good as they do. What we don't know about Mesi is how good his chin is.

Mesi has definitely improved over the last year but, I need to see more before I jump on the bandwagon and declare him the next Foreman, Cooney, Tyson, or Morrison. His win over DaVarryl Williamson is eye catching and impressive. But I have a hard time gauging guys off of first round knockouts. I don't think they are true indicators. In the heavyweight division, a big puncher will look unbeatable when in with second and third tier opposition. In my opinion Williamson is not, and never was a top 10 heavyweight contender. He is the type guy that Mesi will look great against.

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I don't care what anyone says, a fighter, especially a heavyweight cannot truly be judged until he has been cracked on the jaw. Or at least until he has faced resistance. Not many fighters had more knockouts than Mike Tyson on the way up. What did it prove? Nothing. We found out that when Tyson was met with firm resistance, he wasn't nearly the same fighter. And nobody knocks everybody out, nobody!

So let's just evaluate Mesi based on his body of work in the boxing ring. From what we've seen he has a promising future. He has the power, and the willingness to learn. I don't sense that he lacks confidence or harbors any self doubt, but remember, it's still early. I'm just going to evaluate him one fight at a time. And his color will have no bearing at all on what I think. When I see him, I see a fighter, nothing else. I have no idea if he's the next Foreman or Cooney, and I will not jump on and off the bandwagon.

How good will he go on to be, who knows? He's not the best heavyweight prospect I've ever seen, but he is pretty good. All I hope is that Mesi can go on and add some excitement to a heavyweight division that is definitely in the doldrums! That's something all boxing fans are rooting for. That I am sure of.