Written by Rick Folstad
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In a way, James “Lights Out” Toney is like an aging comedian who isn’t funny anymore, but who won’t get off the stage. He keeps telling the same lame, off-color jokes while ducking rotten tomatoes and paper cups tossed at his head. He hears the booing from the audience, but he just can’t let go of the spotlight, even though it doesn’t shine on him as brightly as it once did.

But he was hilarious 20 years ago.

With the crowd growing restless, they finally pull the curtain closed, but Toney somehow finds

an opening and storms back to center stage. And just before he's pulled away, he tells a very funny joke and for a second, everyone quits booing and starts to cheer. They remember how funny he used to be. But it doesn't last long and pretty soon, everyone is booing again.

For many years, Toney was one of the best quotes in town. He'd talk for an hour on a conference call and you'd laugh, wince, shake your head or do all of them at once, wondering if you actually heard what you just thought you heard. Usually, you did.

At some point in the conference call, Toney would remind everyone that he was the best (fill in the blank) middleweight, super-middleweight, light-heavyweight, cruiserweight or heavyweight in the world and there wasn't anyone even close to him in second place. He was the baddest fighter on the planet and back then, it was hard to argue with him. His strutting and his arrogance were all part of his game plan, part of the show, and they seemed to work pretty well for him. Say what you want about his cockiness,  it all seemed part of the game. In his prime, he was a great fighter.

But then something ugly happened. Toney outgrew the middleweight division, ate himself out of the light-heavies, stopped for a short visit and a handshake with the cruiserweights and then settled comfortably into the heavyweight division like an overweight couch potato plopping down on a soft lounge chair.

As a middleweight, Toney was one of the best of all time. As a heavyweight, he won't be

mentioned in the same sentence with Joe Frazier. Or even Jerry Quarry.

Now 43, he’s slimmed back down to cruiserweight. He’s in Moscow, Russia right now probably doing his best to strain USA-Russian relations. He’s getting ready to fight Denis Ledbedev, the WBA’s No. 1-ranked cruiserweight on Friday at some place called the Khodynka Ice Palace. They'll be fighting for the interim WBA cruiserweight title.

The scary thing is, he’s been in Moscow just long enough to turn the entire country against him, and I’m pretty sure Ledbedev isn’t a big Toney fan. “Lights Out” drew first blood. But he always does.

“You ain’t going to see no lay down like Bernard Hopkins did,” Toney was quoted as saying, referring to the recent Hopkins-Chad Dawson fight that was ruled a technical draw after Dawson threw Hopkins down to the canvas and Hopkins injured his shoulder. “I will be there to kick (Ledbedev’s) ass right in front of his people. He likes to wait until fighters from my generation get old and that’s made him feel like he can fight. But I’m going to show him what a big mistake he made thinking he can pull that with me.”

Another Toney knee-slapper.

He also said he's in the best shape he's been in in years. And that's easy to believe if he's really down to cruiserweight. But he weighed about 250 pounds in his last fight in February, which he won by decision. To get down to cruiserweight to fight Ledbedev, he's going to have to shed - in pounds - the equivalent of an average-sized third grader.

It's also pretty big talk for a guy who hasn't been tearing things up in any division for the last few years.

In his last seven fights as a heavyweight dating back to 2006, Toney lost two fights to Samuel Peter; won a split decision over a guy named Danny Batchelder; fought to a no-contest against Hasim Rahman; won a split decision over Fres Oquendo; stopped a club fighter named Matthew Geer, who came into the fight with a record of 12-5; and won a decision over Damon Reed (46-15), who has lost five of his last seven fights and has been stopped in four of those five losses.

Of course, those fights don't include the thumping Toney took in August 2010 when he entered the Octagon against UFC legend Randy Couture. Toney was quickly tackled and made to look silly. Mercifully, it was over quick, Toney tapping out in the first few minutes of the fight when he was wrapped up in what they call an arm- triangle choke. Jabs don't work if you never get to use them.

After the fight, Toney was still belligerent, still arrogant, still brash, saying what happened against Couture was a “fluke,” and that it would never happen again.

Let's hope it never happens again. He needs to stay away from anything that isn’t square.

Like all of us, Toney has gotten older. But unlike most of us, he hasn’t gotten any mellower. He’s still out there swinging away, thumbing his nose at the world and still loving it. And don't be surprised if he wins. He keeps hanging around the fight game, threatening to win another title of some sort. He still has a few good jokes, um, fights left in him.

The crazy thing is, you don’t know whether to cheer or boo.

Comment on this article

**Radam G says:**

Don't "cheer or boo." Just laugh your arse off. Hehehehehehehehe! Enough SPIT! Holla!

**Robert Curtis says:**

Slimmed down to Cruiserweight? Seriously? I don't want just one sentence on that subject, Folstad. I want several paragraphs. Is this illusion or reality? Toney actually LOSING WEIGHT and not GAINING. That's news. I can't make a comment until I know if he actually lost a bunch of weight or did not. Don't give me all your smart-ass disappointments. Just the facts, ma'am, as Detective Friday would say. If Toney has actually renounced obesity, then at age 43 he's still interesting. A 210 Toney would not have a chance against any decent UFC fighter, but might take a Klischko the distance in a dull fight. BTW, Toney weighed in at 257, not 250, at his last fight. And that's not counting his breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks in between and before the fight with Diminutive Damon Reed.

**Robert Curtis says:**

Can someone tell me seriously if Toney has retreated from clinical obesity or not?

**Shoulder Roll Defense says:**

Toney is a future hall of famer despite his questionable work ethic. He is one of the best defensive fighters of this generation and is a master at the "shoulder roll" method of defense. The only boxer that "shoulder rolls" better than Toney is Floyd Mayweather jr.

**mortcola says:**

[QUOTE=Shoulder Roll Defense;10304]Toney is a future hall of famer despite his questionable work ethic. He is one of the best defensive fighters of this generation and is a master at the "shoulder roll" method of defense. The only boxer that "shoulder rolls" better than Toney is Floyd Mayweather jr.[/QUOTE]

True. But he is an ineffectual offensive fighter, has been for years now. He can do a whole slew of cute frustrating moves and still not not mount enough of a sustained offense to do more than squeak by guys who aren't even in the top 20. He would have accomplished nothing against the Klitschkos...can you envision a connect rate of less than zero? He was....outboxed...by...Sam...Peter...let that roll around like a moldly McNugget on your tongue. Several years ago. It is only his denial of reality and his amusing, punchy-badass attitude that makes this conversation even possible to have, because as a professional heavyweight he has not existed for years. Now, he may make Ledbedev look bad, a guy who is kind of a slugger without a lot of subtlety. If it is a good performance, I will enjoy it on Youtube. But it is less meaningful than a geriatric Larry Holmes beating Ray Mercer....a tribute to some fine skills and intelligence from a future HOF who will not accomplish anything further in the sport except making a few bucks and getting a little attention. Monte Barrett in WWE. James Toney anorexically getting some really diluted revenge going after the mid-level guy who most recently stepped on a moribund Roy Jones' already shattered eggshell skull. Debate over.

**FighterforJC says:**

[QUOTE=Robert Curtis;10303]Can someone tell me seriously if Toney has retreated from clinical obesity or not?[/QUOTE]

I'd like to know, too. In an interview from several months ago I recall Toney mentioning that his uncontrollable weight gain was due to some thyroid issue. That would make sense.

**Radam G says:**

It is apparently true. No slim Toney was suffering from a thyroid issue when his voice was fading away and his arse was gaining pounds by da day -- night too. Hehehe! Holla!

**mortcola says:**

Toney loses 120-108 on all three cards, staggered and in retreat, punched clumsily. Supposedly injured his knee in the third. Didn't claim to have won - said he had an off night, and would not retire.

**mortcola says:**

Saw much of the fight. Toney had little shoulder roll. Little defense. Shot reflexes. Flimsy, waving punches with a few exceptions. At the press conference, he sounded completely punchy - very few comprehensible words. Very sad. Even if the knee was a significant factor, the rest of the signs are very troubling. Not gonna go well for James in years to come.

**brownsugar says:**

That's sad, personally I haven't considered Toney to be an active boxer ever since he laid down in the octagon against Randy C. while offering very little resistance. It's a shame if he can't find or develop other financial opportunities. They're already using captions when he speaks as if he's speaking a foreign language. Sad indeed.

**amayseng says:**

wasnt toney just making fun of and calling out bernard hopkins for faking an injury even with an xray and mri coming back with a dislocated ac joint? ya i thought so, now toney is claiming an injury and got out boxed 12 rounds to none looking like an old fat nobody, and yeah i was a fan of toney but i just had enough of his ignorance....karma is a bitch

**Radam G says:**

Ditto BIG UP, amayseng! Holla!

**FighterforJC says:**

[QUOTE=amayseng;10338]wasnt toney just making fun of and calling out bernard hopkins for faking an injury even with an xray and mri coming back with a dislocated ac joint? ya i thought

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The difference is Toney fought on.

**mortcola says:**

You have no credibility anymore, dude.

**FighterforJC says:**

[QUOTE=mortcola;10349]F4JC - You have no credibility anymore, dude.[/QUOTE]

Coming from you, it means the opposite, thank you.

**mortcola says:**

[QUOTE=FighterforJC;10350]Coming from you, it means the opposite, thank you.[/QUOTE]

You know it ain't so. You take out your hatred on this list, where you have a reluctant audience. You know this to be true. You're that guy.

**FighterforJC says:**

[QUOTE=mortcola;10352]You know it ain't so. You take out your hatred on this list, where you have a reluctant audience. You know this to be true. You're that guy.[/QUOTE]

LOL. "Hatred," huh? If you take my refusal to bow down to Flopkins, your god, as "hate," then that's your problem. I won't lose any sleep over it.