



Recently, former heavyweight champion Larry Holmes gave a phone interview to the DesertSun.com on the state of professional boxing, with a major focus on today's heavyweight division. As most boxing fans know, Holmes succeeded Muhammad Ali as champ and was never quite accepted by the boxing public and his due respect as an all-time great heavyweight fighter/boxer was a long time in coming.

A lot of that was because he wasn't comfortable during interviews and also lacked Ali's quick wit and charisma. However, let no one forget that he was Ali's near equal as a fighter and only Joe Louis held the title longer and made more consecutive successful defenses of it than Holmes

Holmes Not Of The Golden Era But An Authority On It..LOTIERZO

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Saturday, 21 January 2012 17:02

did.

Today, the 62 year-old Holmes is no longer camera shy and loves to talk about the sport he dominated as champ for seven plus years. Larry is a tremendous ambassador for boxing and his thoughts and opinions are highly valued. But there is one aspect of Larry's personality that can be grating sometimes, and that's the fact that he always refers to himself as being part of the golden age of heavyweights that was dominated by Muhammad Ali, "Smokin" Joe Frazier and George Foreman.

No, Holmes is not a card-carrying member of the golden era of heavyweights. Other than that, the only negative aspect thing a critic could say about Holmes' career and tenure as champ is, and it's something he had no control over, is who did he fight as champion that was so terrific or borderline great? In truth, Holmes' opposition is on par with that of former champ Mike Tyson, who dominated the second half of the eighties with the same authority Holmes did the first half of the decade.

The golden age of the heavyweights really only lasted about five years (1970-75). During those five years Ali, Frazier and Foreman passed the title back and forth among each other. Holmes, who turned pro in 1973, wasn't even a thought and really hadn't arrived as a title threat until early 1978. By the time Holmes defeated Earnie Shavers in his first career signature fight, Ali had lost the undisputed title to Leon Spinks. Joe Frazier was two years retired and touring with his band "Joe Frazier and The Knockouts" and George Foreman was a year into his retirement and starting his Ministry.

The reason Holmes can talk so conclusively about Ali and Frazier is because he served as an upper-tier sparring partner for both circa late 1972 through mid 1975. Larry worked with Frazier during Joe's preparation for his rematch with Ali in January of 1974, being that no other heavyweight in the world was more suited to emulate Ali's movement and jab better than Holmes. Shortly after that Holmes went to work for Ali and was one of his main sparring partners, along with Roy "Tiger" Williams, in helping him get ready for his upcoming title bout with champ George Foreman.

During the interview Holmes was asked to compare the champions during the Ali and Frazier era to the era dominated by Mike Tyson.

"Tyson would not have been able to stand up in that era," Holmes said. "He came along at the

Holmes Not Of The Golden Era But An Authority On It..LOTIERZO

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Saturday, 21 January 2012 17:02

right time and that's it. He couldn't stand up to guys like us, Ali, Frazier. Mike Tyson proved he's a good fighter and a good front-runner, but if you hit him first, then things change."

That may be a little bit of an overstatement on Holmes' part, but it's more accurate than inaccurate. The part that's closest to being accurate is both Ali and Frazier at their best would be favored to beat Tyson during his prime, who as Larry said was the ultimate front-runner. Although Frazier may have had some shaky moments with Tyson early, I'd favor Joe to survive and be around to grind Tyson down and stop him after eight or nine rounds. The inaccuracy of the statement is the part where Larry says Tyson couldn't stand up to guys like "us" because he wasn't a contender during the so-called golden era of heavyweights.

The fact that Larry was stopped by Tyson at age 38, three years after he lost the title to Michael Spinks, doesn't really come into play when matching them prime-for-prime. Holmes was looking for a payday when he fought Tyson in 1988 and wasn't nearly the fighter he was six years earlier. The bout between 21 year old Tyson and 38 year old Holmes is not an indication on how they would've matched up prime for prime.

The writer says when Holmes fought, it was part of the heyday of the heavyweight division, but that's not true as it's been highlighted above. Today, the division is dominated by Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko. And after the Klitschkos one would be hard pressed to name the third best heavyweight fighter in boxing.

"The Klitschko brothers aren't carrying it. People are asking me everyday, 'Who's the heavyweight champion?' I don't know," Holmes said. "I feel sorry for boxing today because the heavyweight division carried boxing and the middleweights carried boxing. The only thing that's carrying boxing now is the middleweight division, and people aren't thinking about the other weight classes."

On that Holmes is completely right. And just as it was the case when Larry was champ, there's nobody around for either Wladimir or Vitali to fight to measure them-self against. Holmes needed an empty package named Muhammad Ali to beat up to get the proverbial monkey off his back. The Klitschkos don't even have that type of fight out there for them.

Larry Holmes may not have been part of the golden era of heavyweights, but he is the greatest heavyweight to come along since the end of that era. And it's a reach to think of a heavyweight title-holder since Larry's prime who would be the betting favorite over him in a head-to-head

Holmes Not Of The Golden Era But An Authority On It..LOTIERZO

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Saturday, 21 January 2012 17:02

clash. At his best I'd favor him to beat the likes of Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield, Riddick Bowe, Lennox Lewis and both Wladimir and Vitali Klitschko.

Actually, it's a little bit sad that Holmes, inarguably one of the greatest all-time heavyweights, is still insecure enough that he needs to tie himself in with those other three (Ali, Frazier and Foreman). Because his accomplishments certainly measure up to the greatest of the greats who have ever held the heavyweight title.

Frank Lotierzo can be contacted at GlovedFist@Gmail.com

[Comment on this article](#)

Radam G says:

Thank God for this new TSSU. Now Bobby C can always read what the REAL one and only Radam G says about the great, but so contrary, Larry Holmes. No doubt, despite his many off-color remarks, he knew and knows da game. Holla!

Matthew says:

I would place Holmes in my all-time top 5 heavyweights, based on the fact that he defended the title 20 times. True, he held the title in an era that wasn't exactly brimming with great challengers, but holding onto the crown for over 7 years is quite a feat. The only noteworthy fighters he did not take on during his title reign were Gerrie Coetzee and Michael Dokes, two of the rotating temporary titleholders of the WBA strap while Holmes was the recognized linear champ (and I don't think anyone today sits around disappointed that those fights never took place). Furthermore, I thought he was the victim of a bad decision in his rematch with Michael Spinks. While he may have just missed out on competing in the golden era of heavyweights, I can't think of anyone more qualified to talk about the current state of the division than the "Easton Assassin."

dino da vinci says:

As usual, Loterzo does awesome work. I know you can only mention just so much in any one article, but it should be noted that Holmes took that fight on short notice with Tyson. Not that at that point it would have mattered.

Holmes was a great, great fighter. Truly. However...

I feel he would have had his hands full with (read: Not favored) Lennox, Riddick. Also, life and death with Holyfield and Tyson.

@ Matthew. Please name the four heavyweights you have ahead of him. And you sure it's only four?

Holmes Not Of The Golden Era But An Authority On It..LOTIERZO

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Saturday, 21 January 2012 17:02

Matthew says:

@Dino. I would rate Ali, Louis, and Foreman ahead of him. Holmes would be 4th on my list, followed by Dempsey, Lewis, Marciano, Johnson, Frazier, and Liston. I admit that I'm no Bert Sugar when it comes to making all-time lists, and I'm relatively young, but this is merely my opinion (albeit a reasonably educated one).

dino da vinci says:

Bert Sugar is not even Bert Sugar anymore. Get well Bert.

I was a Holmes fan right up to the point of the jockstrap quote. But to show you I can be unbiased in these matters, let me give you a hypothetical situation.

God: da Vinci!

Me: Uhmm, Yes?

God: Create "God's List" for the top five heavyweights of all time.

Me: I would be honored, Oh Lord. You will not be disappointed.

God: And make sure Larry Holmes is somewhere in the top five.

Me: Ooooh...

God: Is there a problem?

Me: Can I save him for the list of heavyweight champions that begins with "H"?

God: Did I mention that your soul is at stake?

Me: Maybe you should have somebody from one of the alphabet organizations do this?

They have a lot of experience with fantasy rankings. May I recommend the WBC?

God: You think they could get Holmes in the top three?

Me: For that, you would need the WBA.

God: What about the IBF? After all, he's the reason that organization received credibility.

Me: Naw. The IBF would have the first two slots vacant, forcing me to have only Larry's name on the list. And not even Larry Holmes believes that he could be ranked that high.

God: Oh...Thank you

Me: You're welcome.

Radam G says:

Hehehehehe! That is some weird stuff, Dino da Vinci! I'm reminded of Rev. Peter Popoff. This television peacher claims that God Be Talking to him, Telling him all types of jive and Giving him miracle money. Wow! Let Popoff tell it, God Even Has Given him miracle water from "Russian sea." OMG! What da double fudge bullspit!

I wish that Rev. Popoff would give Money May some of that miracle water to put on the "Lil' Floyd's cojones. Like seeds, they might grow and give him the courageous size to tangle with a live-body fighter -- Da Manny. I know you and every Stank -- I mean Yank -- got got "Lil' Floyd. But it's good. To each his on poison. Da Manny will kick his _____! Holla!

Holmes Not Of The Golden Era But An Authority On It..LOTIERZO

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Saturday, 21 January 2012 17:02

gibola says:

For a long time Ali was the greatest, I never questioned it or queried it. Then as time went on....I though, all these guys Ali beat, Holmes would beat them too.

Holmes beats the hell out of Cooper, Liston, Chuvalo, Quarry, Lyle etc. The only people Ali beat who you have to think could Holmes beat are Frazier, Norton and Foreman.

In truth Ali lost to Frazier once and had titanic struggles the other rimes, had three toss-ups with Norton and beat Foreman.

Saying Ali is better than Holmes is saying Holmes definitely couldn't beat Frazier, Norton and Foreman - sorry I make Holmes favourite over Norton and Foreman and 50-50 with a peak Frazier.

Stylewise a peak Holmes is a nightmare for Ali, who did Ali ever fight who could box like Holmes? Holmes actually outpointing Ali is not a ridiculous proposition.

I'm not saying Holmes is the GOAT - I'm just saying he might be...

dino da vinci says:

[QUOTE=gibola;12980]For a long time Ali was the greatest, I never questioned it or queried it. Then as time went on....I though, all these guys Ali beat, Holmes would beat them too.

Holmes beats the hell out of Cooper, Liston, Chuvalo, Quarry, Lyle etc. The only people Ali beat who you have to think could Holmes beat are Frazier, Norton and Foreman.

In truth Ali lost to Frazier once and had titanic struggles the other rimes, had three toss-ups with Norton and beat Foreman.

Saying Ali is better than Holmes is saying Holmes definitely couldn't beat Frazier, Norton and Foreman - sorry I make Holmes favourite over Norton and Foreman and 50-50 with a peak Frazier.

Stylewise a peak Holmes is a nightmare for Ali, who did Ali ever fight who could box like Holmes? Holmes actually outpointing Ali is not a ridiculous proposition.

I'm not saying Holmes is the GOAT - I'm just saying he might be...[/QUOTE]

I'm borderline speechless. Trust me, what you just accomplished is impressive.

OK, I'll say it. Holmes is NOT a top ten all-time great heavy.

Could any top tier fighter find his way pass another top tier fighter? Of Course! He's supposed to. But you don't look at it on a one fight only basis. If they fought ten times what would the record be?

I, for one, don't assume you plug Larry in to Ali's opponents and he just zips along. We don't even have to address the prime years Ali was deprived of.

Over the years I've had to argue Holmes UP the list, I'm stunned I now find myself discussing that he needs to go much further down.

Just yesterday I was in a discussion about how history is kind to some fighters while unkind to others. This however, borders on unprecedented territory.

Holmes Not Of The Golden Era But An Authority On It..LOTIERZO

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Saturday, 21 January 2012 17:02

That said, I do admire the way you set up your argument. Might have to borrow that page in the future.

Radam G says:

@Gibola, I have mad respect for your opinion, but I doubt that Holmes could beat a prime Joe Frazier or GOAT Muhammad Ali. The late, great Smoke use to whup da double fudge hebejeebeez outta the "Easton Assassin" in sparring session, then would buy him dinner and entertain him with Smokin' Joe's "Knockout" singing band. Even from the amateur days, Larry "So contrary" Holmes have pure hell with short cats like SJF, Ernie Shaver, Sonny "Night Train" Liston and Mike Tyson. In the amateurs, Nick Wells put him to sleep twice. Both times in the first round.

Larry had a bad habit of not moving his head, but his speedy hands saved his arse tons of times. Ernie Shaver had him finished, but could not get passed from Larry's fast hand after knocking him down and having him out on his feet.

Boxing is about properly matching your charge to make him look super, super great. It's prizefighting at its best with the magic -- an optical illusion. Larry was no doubt one of the greatest of all times, but there are some average to good fighters that greats cannot beat. But it doesn't distract from their overall greatness.

I consider GOAT Ali the greatest heavyweight EVER. But I have enough sense and knowledge of the game -- being a gamer myself -- to know that the GOAT would have had the same problems with Rocky Marciano that he had with Doug Jones, the late, great Smokin' Joe Frazier, Kenny "Jaw Broker" Norton and Ernie Shaver. Holla!

Radam G says:

Wow! How many people did Holmes fight who could box like prime GOAT Ali or the late, greats Smokin Joe Frazier and Sonny "Night Train" Liston? C'mon, man! How many fighters did the late, greats Jack Dempsey, Rocky Marciano, Gene Tunney and Ezzard Charles fight who could know like John L Sullivan or Jack Johnson or Mike Tyson for that concern? DDV, don't cow down, you made a great case. Anything could be anything. Holla!

gibola says:

Thanks for the responses guys - believe me I have total love and respect for Ali, Frazier and that whole era - all magnificent champions - but all with weaknesses.

You're dead right Holmes had weaknesses too - relying on foot movement (early career) and his arms and anticipation to block punches (late career) left a stationary head. Cus D'Amato always encouraged Mike Tyson by saying Holmes was 'clean-shot hittable' and this would be the key to Tyson beating him. To me, Holmes vulnerability style-wise was right-hand punchers and big guys who could box.

However Holmes strengths are huge - jab, fast pace, chin, pride, resilience, sheer skill and boxing ability that round after round beat up good quality guys.

Holmes Not Of The Golden Era But An Authority On It..LOTIERZO

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Saturday, 21 January 2012 17:02

Frazier may well have beaten up a novice Holmes in sparring, so what? - the Holmes of 82 would beat up the inexperienced 67 Frazier still refining his style if they sparred. Holmes weakness wasn't to left-hooking pressure fighters, it was to right hands.

What I really don't get caught up in is that all many of Ali's opponents were a threat to a peak Holmes. They weren't. I repeat it comes down to Foreman and Frazier and to a lesser extent, Norton.

I also maintain Ali made his name against punchers and smaller guys, not big guys with boxing skills. You're right Holmes never met anyone with Ali's skill, guts, chin determination. It would be a terribly tricky fight for Holmes. Equally, Ali never met a guy slightly bigger and harder hitting than he was with (in my view) better fundamental boxing skills.

None of this is demeaning Ali, I love him, I just think the 74 Ali v the 82 Holmes is a narrow points win for Holmes. Too big, just as quick, could keep the pace and get the win. The 67 Ali is the harder fight but I think Holmes would be too aggressive and bully him and secure a tight points win.

Ali is an absolute legend but he wasn't unbeatable and we shouldn't talk as if he was.

Too show I'm a realist, guys who would give Holmes fits? Lewis, Bowe, Vitali and Carl Williams (he would and he did!).

Great site, keep up the good work.

Gibola

Radam G says:

It is all good, Gibola. I will just name two of those "BIG GUYS" with grand "boxing skills" that GOAT Ali whup da holy hebejeebz out of. #1 Ernie Terrell, #2 smooth-boxing giant Buster Mathis. I could name five more, but you may look 'em up. We all love somebody and some of us have an inattention blindness in defending 'em, unless we were taught differently. The boxer and person ME were. It is like being a doctor. He will have difficulties operating on his mother, if he sees her as mother at the time of the surgery.

The kid-boxing ME told my icon GOAT Ali that he could not -- at that time in 1980 -- beat Larry "So Contrary" Holmes. The GOAT Ali was a shot fighter at that time. But, IMHO, Ali of 1964, 1967 and 1970-1974 would have been Larry in the flashing way that the Greatest put it on "Big Cat" Cleveland Williams. Holla!

gibola says:

Love the response....however, debate continues my man. You're right Ali fought boxers, but boxers with huge flaws - Mathis (chin, stamina), Terrell (speed of foot and hand, very basic 1-2), Folley (great boxer, too small and too old for Ali), Bugner (lack of desire, power, too defensive), Ellis (size, power, resilience) which proves my point. The real elite, top notch fighters Ali made his name against were aggressive punchers (Frazier, Liston, Foreman) not boxers. Ali never fought a guy who could outbox him, Lyle and Young managed it to a degree but Holmes could have taken it to a whole new level. No way Ali of any era knocks Holmes out, no way Holmes knocks Ali out, it's a distance fight all the way. Ali was extraordinary against Cleveland Williams

Holmes Not Of The Golden Era But An Authority On It..LOTIERZO

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Saturday, 21 January 2012 17:02

back in the day but we know the Big Cat was shot (I think he actually had been shot if my memory serves me!). Holmes doesn't stand there to get hit and if he does he takes the punches. Ali was never a big puncher, Holmes hit harder with the right hand, Ali had the slightly better chin. I don't have a blind spot for Holmes, I just think that if you strip away all the glorious mythology around Ali and base it purely on the boxing ring Holmes is Ali's match. Ask Kenny Norton or Earnie Shavers. Love Ali, love Holmes, love boxing, love TSS.

Thanks for the responses.

Gibola

dino da vinci says:

@Gibola. Testing my memory as well. I believe he was shot by a State Trooper. With a .45. I could be wrong but that's what I remember reading, and I believe it was before Ali fought him.