Antonio Tarver got to Roy Jones first. Glen Johnson got to Roy Jones second. And now the men who beat the man who beat the man who beat the man get to beat each other at the Staples Center in Los Angeles, in a light heavyweight bout broadcast tonight on HBO.

“It’s gonna be a helluva night of boxing, an early Christmas gift to all you diehard boxing fans,” Tarver said, “and we’re determined to finish off this year with a bang. I worked very hard in preparation for this fight and I’m not taking anything lightly. I’m focused, hungry, and I’m ready to go.”

Antonio Tarver is pound-for-pound one of the fight game’s biggest stars. He is also pound-for-pound one of boxing’s best talkers.

“I have a lot of respect for Glen Johnson,” said Tarver. “When you look at his career, the guy has had a lot of bad decisions against him after he obviously won the fight. He had some bumps along the way. He came up short on some really bogus decisions. The political game of boxing has not been good for him, but you have to respect a guy who, no matter how rough it gets, he always seems to land on his feet.”

Tarver also always lands on his feet. He is a boxer. He is a puncher. He is a thinking man’s fighter.

“I know what Johnson is thinking. I see it in him. He is thinking that this is an opportunity of a lifetime. I just need to get past Antonio Tarver. Glen Johnson is looking at me like a piece of juicy steak. I’m very aware of what I have to lose. I’m not taking this fight for granted. I am taking this fight because I have always, always welcomed risk when it comes to boxing, risk in order to prove that I stand alone at the top.”

Tarver made a career out of taking chances. It’s his life’s work.

“Very few fighters today take the risk that I take,” he said. “Just look back on my career. After my first eight, nine or ten fights, I would beg anybody in the top ten to just face me. When I was the number one contender across the board, the champion refused to fight me. I had to go into his backyard after he captured the world by winning the heavyweight championship. I said, ‘Roy, you might be standing tall today, but we all know that you did not take a step up in competition. Rather, you took a step down. You are avoiding your biggest challenge.’ I prophesized that when I asked him, ‘When am I going to get my chance at history?’ He said ‘what history?’ I said ‘the history I will earn after I knock you out.’”

Knocking out Roy Jones with a single punch was a dream-come-true for Antonio Tarver.

“Now I am telling the world that I am on a mission,” Tarver declared. “My dream does not begin and end with Roy Jones. He just happened to be the man in my way. I was the first to really

challenge Roy Jones. I was the first to really challenge his myth, his image, his status. I challenged everything Roy Jones could have brought, because I believed in myself. I always felt that I was the better fighter. I proved that on November 8, regardless of who they say won that fight, and November 8 allowed me to knock Roy Jones out May 15, and whatever happened after that was just a formality."

Kayoing Jones was the accomplishment of a lifetime, but Tarver is not resting on his laurels.

"I see way past that," he said. "You are looking at history in the making. I want the world to recognize Antonio Tarver as one of the best, one of the greatest that ever lived. You know why? Because I am fighting the second-best light heavyweight in the world and we are going to get it on to see who is the ultimate champion. When you get two people who in their hearts feel that they are the best, that is trouble. I know it is going to be tough. He is not going to quit and I am not going to quit. When my hand is raised, then they can bring on the next guy, because I will continue to accept the challenges the big challenges and when it is all said and done you will have to respect me as one of the best whoever did it. I know that there are a lot of stars in Los Angeles, but on December 18, I will be the biggest star shining."

Ringside will be a star-studded. Tarver's fists will do the talking in LA.

"I think I've perfected the sweet science," said the champ. "When you look at boxing, it's to hit and not be hit, and I think my biggest asset is my reflexes, and then again my mind, thinking in the ring. That's carried me through my amateur days and even in my professional days. I can box. I can punch. I'm a great counterpuncher. I've really studied the sport, the sweet science of the game, and I've tried to perfect it."

Tarver was stripped of his titles for making this fight, for doing it his way rather than the man's.

"It was a tough decision, but when you look at the big picture, I think, when it's all said and done, first and foremost you have to take care of business, because that's all you're going to have when the crowds stop cheering and the lights are out. I feel I have to make this statement, because I think Glen and I right now have lightening in the bottle and I don't think this fight could have ever been as big as it is now. We're taking advantage of the moment and I think the winner of this fight comes out better for it. Regardless of who wears those belts, the world will know there's only one champion out there after December 18."

Tarver is the champion - no matter what anyone says.

"The way I look at it, you can't take any of those belts to pay your light bill or feed the kids," Tarver said. "But there's the tradition, so they are very important. I'm coming back for my championships. Make no mistake about it. As long as I reign at the light heavyweight division, I'm gonna get my belts back. And I plan on getting all of them back."

Many hope Tarver will move up in weight to start battling with the big boys.

"It all depends on what opportunities come my way. I'm not dumb by any means. I'm a

businessman. They gave Roy Jones $10 million to go fight what some call the least talented heavyweight champ in history in John Ruiz. I'm using that as a measuring stick. I'm a transcender and I'm looking to transcend the game," Tarver said. "So I'm listening."

We too are listening, because Tarver talks the talk. We are also watching, because Tarver walks the walk.