

Antonio Tarver Loses to Glen Johnson

Written by Matthew Aguilar
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Glencoffe Johnson, with a superior workrate and a ton of heart, shocked recognized light heavyweight champion Antonio Tarver Saturday, winning a 12-round split decision in a thrilling affair at the Staples Center in Los Angeles.

With the win, Johnson becomes the “The Ring” 175-pound champion and records the latest surprise in a year dominated by upsets.

Johnson won by scores of 115-113 (Melvina Lathan) and 115-113 (Chuck Giampa) to win the battle of Roy Jones Jr.-conquerors. Judge Marty Denkin scored the bout 116-112 for Tarver.

“Heart, hard work and determination,” Johnson told HBO when asked what won him the fight. “It’s been a long road. I had to get here. And I’m finally here.

I hope I’m appreciated.”

Johnson, 42-9-2 (28 knockouts) should be appreciated after a gutsy effort against a man who was taller and considered much more talented. He took the fight to Tarver, pounding the body and applying constant pressure.

It was a fast-paced fight that saw both fighters breathing heavy by round four. Tarver appeared to have an early lead, but seemed to relax down the stretch. And the ever-opportunistic Johnson took advantage.

Tarver, 22-3 (18 knockouts), slipped to the canvas in the 12th round, and was pummeled in a corner as the fight ended. But he had won the early portion of the round and appeared to many ringsiders to have pulled it out in the final two rounds.

HBO’s Harold Lederman scored it 115-113 for Tarver.

The fight was fought for the lightly-regarded IBO light heavyweight title after the IBF stripped Johnson and the WBA and WBC stripped Tarver for not fighting mandatory challengers.

But the quality of the fight proved it was the only fight in the division that really mattered.

Johnson started fast as Tarver appeared to be waiting for the one punch knockout that resulted in his career-defining victory over Jones on May 15, 2004. Once Tarver seemed to realize he couldn’t knock Johnson out, he began using his physical advantages.

But, by then, Johnson had already put some early rounds in the bank – at least according to the scorecards of Lathan and Giampa.

Both fighters at times appeared stunned, but neither seemed in serious jeopardy of being

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knocked down.

“I have to knock everybody out,” Tarver told HBO’s Larry Merchant. “Glen fought a gallant fight. But that’s the scorecards for you.”

Tarver said he injured his hand in the fourth or fifth round, but didn’t use that as an excuse.

“It was excruciating pain,” he said. “But I fought my fight.”

Both men said they wanted a rematch after a fight that had the L.A. crowd on its feet.

“Antonio Tarver is a great fighter,” Johnson said. “I didn’t expect him to fight as well as he did.”

Tarver said: “I thought I won the fight.”