A year ago, Glengoffe Johnson ended his year the same way as his previous four; with one win or less in the calendar year and a lot of contempt for boxing judges. Even with a career-reviving win over Eric Harding earlier in the year, Johnson finished the year with a 1-1-2 record (though it could be argued that it should really read 4-0) and having won only three of his past eleven bouts.

The good news was that, despite his last fight ending in a draw, he was still in line for another shot at the vacant IBF Light Heavyweight title. The bad news – he had to once again travel to Clinton Woods' hometown of Sheffield, England if he wanted to avenge the draw and claim the crown. Having never shied away from a challenge in or out of the ring, Johnson gladly took to the task. This time, he did enough to convince all three judges that being at home just wasn't good enough for Woods not to lose. In a fight that historically was not meant to go Johnson's way, he left the ring and England as champion for the first time in his career.

When he returned home to Miami, he found himself overshadowed by two other Florida-based light heavyweights – none other than longtime pound-for-pound king Roy Jones Jr. and his new archrival, Antonio Tarver. Not only was Johnson still considered no better than third best in the division, he was still only the third best light heavyweight in his own state as a result. But that wasn't why his winning efforts were paid little mind. It was because Jones and Tarver were bracing for a rematch of their own – a rematch to their November 2003 contest, one day after Johnson's first fight with Woods, no less. In fact, it was before that very fight when Tarver decided to vacate the IBF crown, thus upgrading Johnson-Woods I – and eventually II - from an elimination bout to a vacant title fight.

Seeing as how Jones and Tarver were considered by all to be the top two light heavyweights in the world who fought to near even terms last year, all eyes were focused on their May rematch in Las Vegas. Once Tarver knocked Roy out with a single counter left, nobody cared that Glen Johnson was able to win a world title after 11 years and 51 fights in the paying ranks. Nobody except Roy Jones, that is.

When Jones announced that he'd be looking to explore other options rather than gun straight for a rubber match with Tarver, Johnson's name entered the mix. But it was only after Fabrice Tiozzo – the current WBA champion – had been "frowned upon" by many as a potential opponent. Regardless, Johnson could care less how he got there. All he knew was that he wasn't going anywhere, except into the ring for a dream fight and a career-high payday to boot.

All Johnson was supposed to do on that late-September night in Memphis was show up with his IBF strap in tow. Be introduced as the champion, and then allow Roy to do his thing. That's what many so-called experts throughout the industry figured anyway. Hey, it's Roy, so it must be a well-calculated "risk", right? That is apparently what every boxing newspaper writer in the country thought, as not one showed up.

Those among the internet media that decided to come out that night witnessed a piece of history. They watched as Glen sprinted out the gate and swarm a seemingly shell-shocked Roy throughout the fight. Where in most cases skill overcomes will, nothing of the sort would occur this night. Johnson had come too far in his career to blow the biggest opportunity of his life. No, this would be a night where Roy could not turn back the clock and prove that he's still good enough to rank among today's best. It would be a night where Roy, who many had figured would have his arm raised in victory for the fiftieth time in his career, would instead end the night flat on his back and completely knocked out. For the first time in five years, it would be a night where Glen Johnson would have his arm raised in victory for the second straight fight.

Had the year ended at that point, many would have considered Antonio Tarver's previous win over Roy to be the more significant of the two. Such was apparent when, after the fight, the two main names being thrown around for Fighter of the Year were Tarver and Diego Corrales, whose calendar year boasted wins over Joel Casamayor and previously unbeaten two-division titlist Acelino Freitas. Nobody was mentioning Johnson's name, except to refer to him as "that other guy that knocked out Roy this year."

But in late October, everyone would soon be mentioning his name. Tarver was mentioning him as the next opponent he faced, even willing to give up his WBC title in order to make the fight happen. Quite fitting, as it was when Tarver gave up his IBF title a year prior that made it possible for Johnson to become a serious player in the division. Though, he would no longer be playing with the IBF. They decided that since he was facing Tarver, and not their mandatory Rico Hoye, that it be best if he were to be stripped of the title. Forget that a Tarver fight would generate far more revenue, and that Hoye was damn lucky to even be given the decision in his IBF elimination bout with Montell Griffin – the IBF decided that the right thing was for Hoye to be fighting for the title next, and that was that. Rather than wait out what would have been at best a modest purse bid, Johnson dumped the belt and opted for the million dollar payday and shot at becoming the division ruler, alphabet hardware notwithstanding.

As a result of the fight being made, many in the industry decided that the winner would be considered Fighter of the Year, or at least be the strongest contender to Corrales for such honors. As with many of his previous bouts, Johnson was written off even before the fight started. For when many had said "the winner", they had already pre-determined that Tarver would conquer Johnson just as easily as he had the almighty Roy Jones. Some had even gone as far as to say that while Johnson should be commended for overachieving, his luck would simply run out on December 18. He lacked the punch to hurt Tarver, the skills to keep up with him… despite the fight being between the best two fighters in the division, many considered the gap between one and two to be much larger than the 3-1 odds that came with the fight.

But beating the odds was nothing new to Johnson. Not in his life, not in his career, not even in 2004. Very few figured him to leave Sheffield as champion. Even less figured him to give Roy Jones a tough fight, much less knock him out cold. Finally, even less than that expected him to leave Los Angeles and end 2004 having won three in a row. In fact, only two of the twenty-two writers for TheSweetScience.com who offered predictions for the fight had believed Johnson could take a decision. (Guess who was one of those writers.)

After twelve hard fought rounds in perhaps the best light heavyweight fight of the year, Johnson proved those two writers right and disproved many, many scribes around the boxing world wrong. The fight was close enough to where many believed that Tarver in fact deserved the nod. After all, he was the busier of the two and according to CompuBox numbers landed quite a few more punches than did Johnson. But punchstat numbers do not measure a fighter's heart. They do not always indicate who is dictating the terms of the fight, even if the other fighter is the busier fighter. Two of the three judges did witness as such that night, and as a result Johnson was able to avoid the ugly trend that had preceded him and finally walk away from a close fight with his hand raised in victory. After a career filled with turmoil, Johnson completed 2004 by beating three top-ten fighters, including the division's two best, and now sits atop the light heavyweight division with endless opportunities lying ahead for 2005.

The only thing left for this year is to determine whether or not he did enough to beat out Chico Corrales, Winky Wright and Jose Luis Castillo, among others, for Fighter of the Year honors. His overall career suggests that he goes down in a disputed decision and is forced to settle for bridesmaid. 2004 suggests that he will no longer allow himself to lose – in the ring and hopefully at the awards table.

For your consideration; Glengoffe Johnson, 2004's Fighter of the Year.