

## The Final Curtain: Tyson, Holyfield and Jones Jr.

Written by David Payne

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The awards shows have started and the sprouts are on the boil, so the year-end must be almost upon us. Often a time of sadness and quiet reflection, it struck me as an appropriate time to bid farewell to a trio of illustrious fighters we're unlikely to see fighting, meaningfully at least, ever again.

### Mike Tyson

*"The lonely one offers his hand too quickly to whomever he encounters." (Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche 1844-1900)*

It is true to say that we haven't seen the infamous black garb for the last time just yet, but as a heavyweight of any significance his flame was extinguished for good this year. The blinkered Tyson fans still exist, not as publicly or in the same numbers as they once did, but they're out there still believing that even without Christopher Lloyd and a DeLorean Tyson could still roll back the years. Believing he could muster two rounds of the 'old' Tyson to dethrone Vitali Klitschko, if he could just go back to Kevin Rooney or get his weight down or move his head or train harder they say. Ignoring the 15 years of decline and neglect and the series of pummelings the 38 year old has endured since the halcyon days of the 80's.

Only the delusional are prepared to believe, to buy the excuses. And not too many will be buying Tyson PPV in 2005 either.

However, to remember Iron Mike as the sad, forlorn curiosity he's now become would be to do the man a great disservice. It would be churlish to forget his illumination of an entire decade, the fact he brought a whole new audience to boxing, secured the heavyweight crown at just 21 and was arguably the most entertaining heavyweight to ever lace the gloves.

Thank you and goodnight Mike.

### Evander Holyfield

*"Some have been thought brave, because they were afraid to run away." (Thomas Fuller 1608-1661)*

Arguably the most maligned heavyweight of recent times, but only because the sport and the fans love him so much, the Real Deal really has stayed on too long and only the man himself believes the downward spiral he's been fighting for the past decade can be overcome.

Ugly points defeats to heavyweight belt-holders are one thing, stoppage defeats to super-middleweights and a shutout points loss to a 37 year old fringe contender both testify to the chasm that exists between now and Evander Holyfield's long lost prime. Of course, Holyfield's story should have ended with his defeat and knockdown to the game, but limited Ruiz three years ago. Honourable though Holyfield motives are - he fights for glory, not for money, having accumulated in the region of \$200 million in his career - it doesn't make his

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quest any less ludicrous.

But like archrival Mike Tyson, boxing historians will fail Holyfield if he's remembered for recent results and not for his dominance at cruiserweight, his rise to the heavyweight summit and his willingness to tackle heavyweights against whom he was nearly always physically out-gunned. His trilogy with Bowe stands comparison with any modern day series and his exposure of the Tyson myth when supposedly finished is testimony to his technique, strength, work ethic and willpower.

It appears a suspension for his own protection is the only way to keep the 42 year old from continuing on his quest for a fifth world title and thankfully somebody has now given it a try. Inevitably, Holyfield has challenged it.

Thanks for the memories Evander.

### **Roy Jones Jr.**

*"Don't cry because it's over. Smile because it happened." (Theodor Seuss Geisel, a.k.a. Dr. Seuss 1904-1991)*

Will we ever see the jewel of the nineties back in a ring? His ego and history dictate that we will, but as a stellar attraction he's as done as done gets. But lest we forget just 18 months ago he was being mentioned as the greatest fighter ever to grace a ring. In the UK, respected Boxing News editor, Claude Abrams, for one, proclaimed that he was following the historic victory over John Ruiz.

The cynics heckled from the sidelines, waiting and watching patiently for either Father Time or a big puncher to finally catch up. Sadly they both did and on the same night, and Glen Johnson, a fighter Jones would have toyed with in his prime, repeated the trick just to be sure the message got home. Sadly for Roy the inescapable truth was his unorthodox style, built on the quicksand of reflex and youth, would eventually leave him up to his neck in the sticky stuff if he stayed too long. And so it came to pass.

It's sad that the final memory of Jones will be of him prone on the canvas, a crushing reminder that nobody can escape the clutches of Father Time indefinitely. But to remember the consensus future hall of famer in this way would be cruel; a man who barely lost a round for a decade, who turned back the challenge of contenders as capable as James Toney, Mike McCallum, Bernard Hopkins and Virgil Hill and did it all with dazzling panache.

Cheers for the artistry Roy, and farewell.

As you reach for the 2005 wall planners and indigestion tablets this Christmas, remember this trio of ring greats for whom 2004 represented the final curtain and for the joy they brought.