

## No Excuses for Ruiz this Time

Written by Rick Folstad  
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His head was in an amusement park outside Orlando.

That's the unofficial excuse, though you wonder why his head wasn't sitting squarely on his shoulders in Las Vegas, considering it was the biggest fight of his career.

That's where the other guy was, the guy he was fighting who was trying to knock his head into a fantasyland of its own.

At least that's how Norm "Stoney" Stone explains it, justifies the loss, explains away the poor performance.

"He wasn't the same kid," Stone said of his fighter, former WBA heavyweight champ John Ruiz, who lost his title to Roy Jones Jr., back in March at the Thomas and Mack Center in Las Vegas. "Physically, he was there, but Disney World is where his head was at. But he's back now. The divorce is over and I feel like he's ready. He's taking this fight (against Hasim "The Rock" Rahman) for peanuts, so you know he's going to be hungry."

Divorce?

No wonder Ruiz couldn't slip a punch or land a hook or force Jones into a corner and rip his insides out. He was thinking about other things.

We should have seen it coming, known right away it was a woman who cost him his title and the biggest opportunity of his life.

"The Wednesday before the fight, his wife called him up and talked about reconciliation," Stone said on a conference call this week, insinuating that Ruiz's mind got a little side-tracked just before the Jones fight and caught the red-eye to Mickeyville. "If I had known about the call, I never would have let him fight."

A phone conversation with a dueling spouse might be grounds for canceling a dentist appointment, but it's not strong enough to call off a championship fight worth several million dollars. That close to the opening bell, it would take the loss of a limb to stop the fight. Money talks. Emotions walk.

And if you think about it, his wife's timing was almost brutal. She calls him that close to his fight? Messes with his head? Makes you wonder how much she bet on her ex-husband to lose. Call him up, make some promises.

Or maybe she just wanted to see if he could get her and her "friend" closer seats to the ring.

Now, nine months later, Ruiz is getting ready to fight Rahman on Dec. 13 at the Boardwalk Hall

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in Atlantic City for the WBA interim heavyweight title.

It's "interim" because Jones holds the WBA title he took from Ruiz and no one really knows what he's going to do with it. He could sign to fight anyone from Mike Tyson to Arturo Gatti, if Gatti could put on an extra 40 pounds and quickly grow four inches. After his close call with Antonio Tarver, maybe Jones will decide to quit the fight game and go into the lucrative rooster-raising industry.

If Jones doesn't defend his title against the Ruiz-Rahman winner - who will become the mandatory challenger - he supposedly loses his belt. Fortunately, he has a few extras in his closet.

The problem is, the only thing mandatory in the fight game today is a protective cup.

As for Ruiz and his family troubles, Stoney said he's not the same head case he was 10 months ago.

"John lost weight for (the Jones) fight because he was having trouble with his family life," Stone said. "But he's a different fighter now and this is a great fight for us. He's training for 12 rounds, but the fight won't go 12 rounds. I guarantee it won't go 12 rounds."

Stone, who was present for the teleconference even when his fighter wasn't, gave out a warning to Rahman.

"When you guys talk to him, make sure you tell Rahman to be in shape for this fight," Stone said. "We don't want no excuses."

Yeah, that would be terrible.