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The accolades were over-flowing when Roy Jones downed John Ruiz this past March for the WBA heavyweight crown. Jones became the first middleweight champion to capture a heavyweight belt in over a hundred years.

Pundits like Max Kellerman deduced that with his victory over 'the Quiet Man' that maybe, just maybe Jones was a superior fighter than Sugar Ray Robinson. Let me repeat that, I know some of you must be in shock, but Kellerman stated that because Jones downed Ruiz, that makes him possibly the greatest pound-for-pound performer ever.

Yeah. That's like a team in the NFL downing the Chicago Bears and being named Super Bowl champions. Or sweeping the Tampa Bay Devil Rays and being crowned World Series winners. That win was never put into it's proper context: it was a notable achievement, but it's also a by-product of a watered down game, that has multiple 'champions' in each divisions. What I'm saying is that Jones- once again- took the path of least resistance and took on a guy, who while 30 pounds bigger, was a far inferior fighter.

Ruiz, may have had a title belt, but he made absolutely no claim to being the true heavyweight champion. It's not as if Jones had beat Lennox Lewis, he beat a hand-picked heavyweight that he knew he could beat.

As the months went on I did notice more observers placing the fight in it's proper context. Instead of comparisons to Ray Robinson, the prevailing thought was,' Yeah, it was a good win and all, but geez, it WAS only John Ruiz' It's amazing how just stepping back for a moment and taking a deep breath will do for your perspective. It was put into even clearer focus when Jones' old nemesis, also a former middleweight titlist back in the day, James Toney, not only beat Evander Holyfield, but stopped him in nine.

Now, you can say that Holyfield is as old the Oakland Raiders, but this is the same 'Real Deal' that last year went the distance with Chris Byrd, beat Hasim Rahman and essentially beat Ruiz all three times they met.

Fast forward to last weekend and Jones was back down in weight against WBC light heavyweight champion Antonio Tarver, who had basically picked up the titles that Jones had vacated when he decided to move up in weight. Tarver, was a skilled, if awkward, southpaw with a deep amateur pedigree(he has an Olympic bronze medal from the 1996 games) and more importantly, no trepidation in facing Jones.

And for 12 rounds, he gave him all he could handle. When Jones was backed up against the ropes, Tarver would bang away, although many of the punches were blocked or deflected, some of the punches did land cleanly on Jones face. Jones would have much better luck in the center of the ring, where his faster feet and superior hand speed would control things. But in this particular fight, Jones got hit as much as anytime in his career and he was made to miss by the

crafty Tarver, more than any other fight in the past.

You could see bruising and abrasions on Jones' face for the first time ever. He finally looked as though he was in a fight- which he was.

Jerry Roth would score the bout 114-114, Dave Harris would score the bout 116-112, Glen Hamada, scored it 117-111, both for Jones. The final announcement of the scores would bring a loud chorus of boo's from the live audience. In fact, before the cards were read, Tarver would receive a large ovation as he stood atop the second rope, when Jones did the same, you could hear boo's, which brought an embarrassed Jones down from his perch.

It was a close fight, most of the ringside media either had it a draw or a one point victory for either man. Which brings into question how Hamada and Harris had it so wide for Jones. In fact Hamada would judge the tenth stanza for Jones despite that being Tarvers best round. For the first time, we saw Jones' cage rattled. He was hurt and it showed. It was a shocking scene and you could sense that Tarver was on the verge of an upset. But unfortunately he failed to capitalize on his opportunity despite the exhortations of his trainer Buddy McGirt.

But in getting the hard fought victory, Jones was exposed on many fronts. First of all, Tarver is a very good fighter, but could he have competed in the 1970's when the 175 pound class had guys like Eddie Gregory, Michael Spinks, Dwight Braxton, Marvin Johnson, Yaqui Lopez, Mike Rossman and Mathew Saad Muhammad? Probably not. Also, Tarver proved that if you have good technical skills and above average athletic ability, you can neutralize a lot of his flash and dash with a simple and consistent jab. And if you have a general understanding of ring generalship, you can stay free of the counter-punching traps that he lays. For much of the night, Tarver kept Jones at bay with his long stick.

Which brings me to another point, why was Jones ever given credit for being among the all-time greats at light heavyweight anyway? Take a look at who he's beaten at that weight class: Clinton Woods, Glenn Kelly, Julio Gonzalez, Derrik Harmon, Eric Harding(who gave him fits), Richard Hall, David Telesco, Reggie Johnson, Richard Frazier, Otis Grant, Lou Del Valle, Virgil Hill, Montell Griffin and an ancient Mike McCallum.

Out of that roster of light heavy's, Hill was an accomplished fighter at one point, but past his prime when he was stopped by a vicious body shot by Jones in 1998, Reggie Johnson was a pretty good middleweight and Griffin was a very tricky fighter who gave Roy a tough time before Jones got DQ'd and suffered a very questionable loss. The rest were a collection of either soft, carefully chosen opponents and mis-mandatories.

Not exactly Archie Moore, Billy Conn and Ezzard Charles, I'd say.

Hiding behind his HBO contract- which basically allowed him to run rampant in picking up millions of dollars at a time- Jones would fight one undeserving mandatory stiff after another.

But when Tarver had elevated himself to the IBF mandatory position in 2000, he had his promoter at the time Murad Muhammad write a letter questioning his attributes as the number

one contender. Eventually, the IBF- which has had an incestuous relationship with Muhammad- acquiesced and forced Tarver into a box-off with Harding for the right to face Jones. Harding would beat Tarver in June of 2000(a loss though, that would be avenged a few years later) and Jones was free from having to face Tarver, until he agreed to face him this past Saturday.

It's funny, but he sure wasn't concerned about the credentials of some of his other mis-mandatories like Woods, Kelly, Hall and Frazier. But for some reason, Tarver- who just happened to fit the profile of two other guys that Jones was reluctant to face in the past, Frankie Liles and Michael Nunn- was somehow deemed not worthy of facing Jones at the time. No Tarver wasn't great by any means in 2000, but compared to those other guys I mentioned he was downright Bob Fitzsimmons-esque in his accomplishments.

Now, see if Jones will give Tarver a rematch. Especially in light of how difficult it was the first time out and the fact that Tarver will have even more confidence going into a return bout. That's an equation that Jones simply doesn't want to handle.

Roy Jones, is he a hypocrite? No doubt. A bully who picks his spots? Perhaps. A great athlete? Undeniably. An all-time great fighter?

Hardly.