

Are you sure he can't do a heart transplant?

Written by Rick Folstad

Monday, 20 October 2003 21:00

Arrogance is part of Roy Jones Jr.'s arsenal of bad things to beat you with. He carries it with him into the ring and he keeps it close by his side when he's outside it. The braggadocio is his way of reminding the world who he is, just in case it starts to forget.

Still, you could say Jones doesn't brag as much as he states the obvious, tells you he's the greatest fighter walking the planet, while reminding you that the sun will rise in the east and eventually set in the west.

You don't argue with the guy because you can't. You know who Roy Jones is and you know which direction the sun will come up.

Jones hasn't cornered the market in conceit, but he has one of the bigger shares. In the fight game, the title of "World's Biggest Ego," doesn't fall on the shoulders of one fighter. It's split into a thousand pieces spread out over every division, though the three fighters with the most commanding shares and the biggest names are probably Jones, James "Lights Out" Toney and Bernard Hopkins.

The "I am the greatest," act was kind of fun when Muhammad Ali first brought it out of the closet and dusted it off. Now, 40 years later, we realize it was part of the sales pitch, part of the Muhammad Ali character. You can almost picture him grinning and rolling his eyes when he started his ranting and raving about how great he was, loving the way everyone took him seriously but himself.

Funny thing. He really was the greatest, and few argued with him. So if you were wondering who the greatest fighter in the world is today, ask Roy Jones Jr. Or give Toney a call. Maybe you can get in touch with Hopkins. They are all great fighters and have strong opinions about themselves, but their loud, egotistical act has finally grown a little stale.

Maybe that's why a part of me is pulling for Antonio Tarver on Nov. 8 when he defends his IBF and WBC light-heavyweight titles against Jones at the Mandalay Bay Resort in Las Vegas.

Unfortunately, the only way Tarver wins that fight is if Jones agrees to use pillows in place of gloves. Still, Jones is too smart to take Tarver for granted. Not only is he the fight game's best fighter, he's also one of its smartest.

At a recent Roy Jones media day BBQ at his ranch north of Pensacola, the WBA heavyweight champ of the world talked about his upcoming fight with Tarver, who is training with Buddy McGirt, fast becoming a legend in the fight game.

Asked how big a difference McGirt will make in Tarver, Jones paid tribute to McGirt.

"Buddy will add to any fighter," Jones said. "He was a great fighter in his own day. He can look

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at any fighter, assess the situation and instantly know what that fighter needs to improve on. He's good at that."

Then Jones gave us a Royism. "But he can't put a heart in (Tarver's) chest."

Drum roll. The fight itself is being billed as, "It's Personal," though you get the feeling it's more personal for Tarver than Jones. For Jones, it's just another busy Saturday night in Las Vegas, another fighter put in front of him to be knocked down.

"If I stun (Tarver) early, he'll never see round two," Jones said. "At first, I'll be Roy Jones Jr., chilling until I get caught with a good shot. Then it's over. RJ (known as Jones' mean-spirited alter-ego) is coming out and he's gonna be in (Tarver's) face. I'm not interested in teaching him a lesson. He will be getting the lesson as I win. Trust me when I tell you the first time he hits me, it's over. We're friends, we cool, but I'm still gonna knock him out when I see him."

Nothing personal, right?