

James Toney Vs. Fres Oquendo For Title

Written by David A. Avila

Thursday, 11 December 2008 19:00

Two heavyweight world title fights are taking place: one in Europe and the other in the good old U.S. of A. You can imagine where James "Lights Out" Toney's fight is taking place.

Because the European heavyweights holding the various titles won't fight Toney, he's taking on Fres Oquendo for the vacant IBA heavyweight world title on Saturday Dec. 13, at the Morongo Casino. The fight card will be televised on Versus.

So why does Toney scare the bejeebers out of the Klitschkos and other Eastern Europeans?

Here is Toney, who stands two inches below six feet in height, weighs about 230, and has 40 years on this earth. Twenty of those years have been inside the prize ring so what is it that scares all the heavyweight champions?

Now there are going to be tons of people complaining that Toney doesn't deserve the title shot and that he is not good enough and all that other blather.

But does Hasim Rahman deserve it?

Wasn't it just last July that Toney was battering Rahman into quitting in the ring. Sure he had a bad cut due to an accidental clash of heads. But can you imagine Toney quitting like that?

I didn't think so.

Toney has been scaring the heck out of heavyweights ever since he became one of the few in the division to knock out Evander Holyfield. Only Riddick "Big Daddy" Bowe could make that claim and he's about a foot taller.

Before his fight with Holyfield he promised the Real Deal that he was going to knock him out if he didn't run. Holyfield nearly laughed. Then, on October 2003 the California based heavyweight turned the lights out on the legendary warrior.

If Holyfield is the ultimate warrior, then what is Toney? Superman?

In two decades of facing the best fighters possible, Toney has never been knocked out despite facing heavyweights, speedsters or knockout artists.

He's like the Rock of Gibraltar.

Other heavyweights look at him and look for an exit.

Need proof?

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“Once we were supposed to meet the Klitschkos in Las Vegas but when I got there they had ran out,” said Toney about a meeting scheduled four years ago that evaporated. “They were afraid I was going to jump them.”

When you think about the scenario it prompts laughter because Toney is about seven inches shorter than both Wladimir and Vitali Klitschko.

One reason for the fear is trainer Emanuel Steward who saw first hand what Toney could do to opponents with his boxing prowess when he was a regular at the Kronk Gym in Detroit.

“The style is all wrong for Wladimir,” says Steward, who’s trained numerous Hall of Fame fighters including Lennox Lewis. “Toney is not the right style for my fighter.”

More than a few say that Steward knows Toney can beat the younger Klitschko and possibly the bigger one too.

“They’re cowards,” said Toney in the past who has lately toned it down a bit to “they’re afraid of me.”

Outside of the prize ring Toney displays an easy-going infectious charisma that appeals to boxing fans, inside the ring he exhibits a demeanor that has heavyweight champions walking out the door when his name is mentioned.

One fighter not afraid to face Toney (70-6-3, 43 KOs) is Chicago’s talented heavyweight Fres Oquendo (29-4, 18 KOs).

“He’s a legend,” said Oquendo who expects the fight to be more scientific than the normal fight but with lots of punches thrown. “Toney is a crafty veteran fighter.”

The original opponent was to be Tony Thompson but the basketball size boxer was felled by illness.

“It was a blessing to me,” said Oquendo, 35, who was searching for another fight this past year. “I had one tournament that fell out and another fight on Nov. 29, that didn’t come through. This opportunity came just perfect.”

Perhaps more snake-bitten than the Puerto Rican heavyweight is Toney who has tripped over bicep injuries, Achilles tendons, steroid detection, weight problems and downright avoidance by the holders of the world titles.

Nobody wants to face Toney.

“James Toney is the most avoided fighter in the heavyweight division,” said Dan Goossen, president of Goossen-Tutor Promotions. “That’s why we’re making this fight between two fighters that others avoid.”

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Goossen intends to have the winner chase after one of the three holders of the other heavyweight titles namely the Ukraine's Wladimir Klitschko (IBF and WBO), Vitali Klitschko (WBC) and Ruslan Chagaev (WBA) of Russia.

Oquendo has his own dreams of winning a title and he's anxious to fight one of his idols Toney.

"I've been watching James Toney since I was an amateur," said Oquendo, who has been fighting professionally since 1997. "I used to watch him fight in the Poconos (mountains)."

Though he's already fought for a world title unsuccessfully on several occasions, Oquendo expects this to be his toughest assignment.

"He's a veteran and he's very hard to hit," Oquendo says. "Toney is a very crafty fighter."

Oquendo wants to atone for his losses in title fights to Evander Holyfield, Chris Byrd, John Ruiz and David Tua.

"We're both one fight away from fighting for a world championship," said Oquendo.

Toney doesn't care who is facing him.

"I will fight whoever they put in front of me, God Bless them," Toney says.

For tickets and information (800) 252-4499.