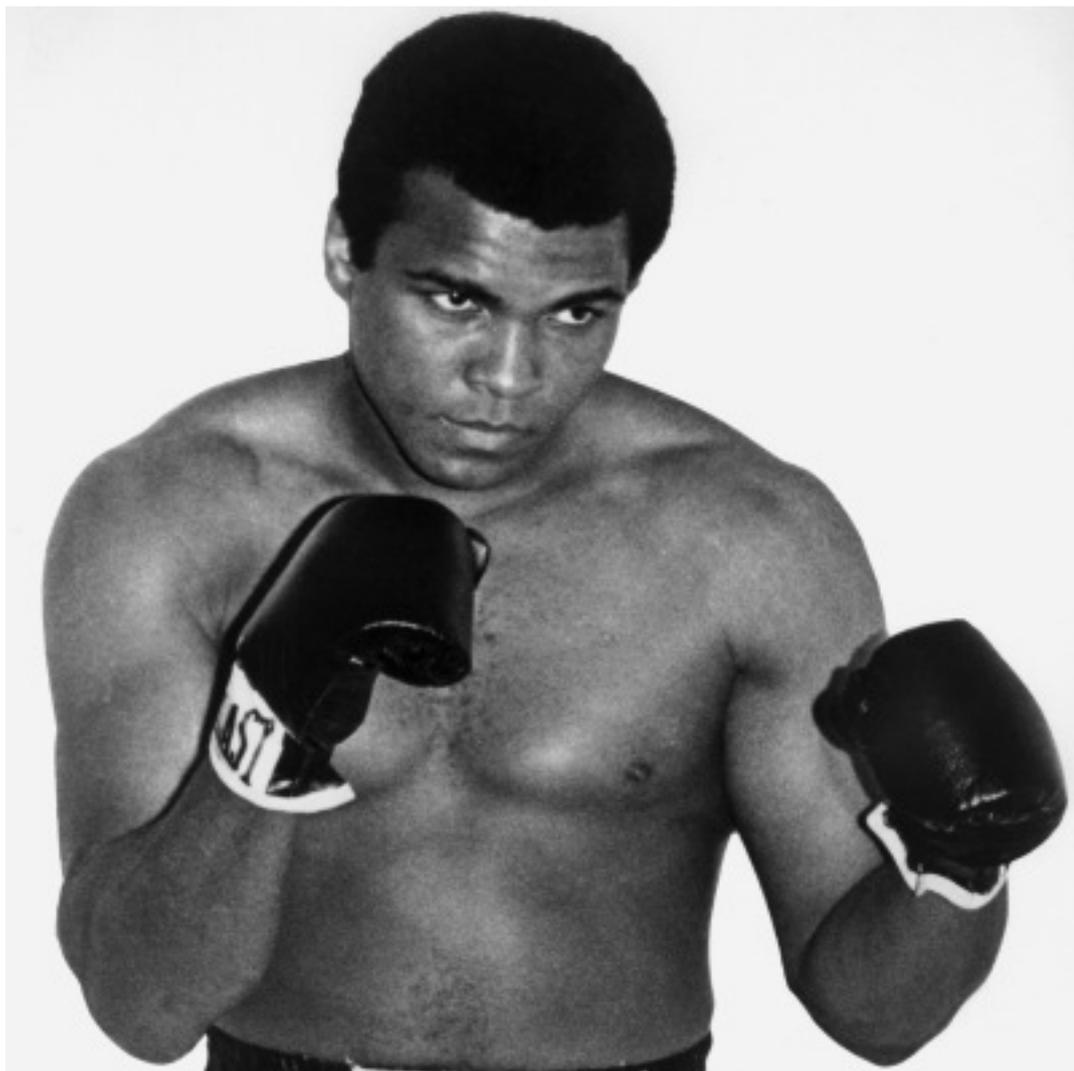


Written by Frank Lotierzo
Monday, 30 July 2012 11:32



The 2012 Olympic games are underway and boxing is getting its fair share of air-time on CNBC for a welcome change. Muhammad Ali is there and has been presented with awards and is being treated like the citizen of the world he truly is. It's also ironic that one of the biggest stars in the history of Olympic boxing, Cuban sensation Teofilo Stevenson, recently passed. Incidentally, it is the 40th anniversary of Stevenson winning his first gold medal in Munich Germany back in 1972.

As most all boxing fans know Stevenson won gold Medals at the 1972, 1976 and 1980 Games and if Cuba didn't boycott the 1984 Games in Los Angeles, it's plausible Teofilo would've won the gold again. If you recall, Tyrell Biggs won the gold medal at the 1984 Games. Biggs, who went onto fight for the heavyweight title against Mike Tyson, lost to Stevenson in 1984 before the Games. Granted, Biggs improved after losing to Stevenson but there's no doubt the Cuban fighter would've been favored had they met in Los Angeles in 1984.

LOTIERZO'S LOWDOWN No, Stevenson Would Not Have Beaten Ali

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Monday, 30 July 2012 11:32

Since Stevenson's passing a few months ago there have been things said and written about how he would've been the fighter to end Ali's domination of the heavyweight division during the 1970s. It makes for eye catching copy, and it's true in years past, a gold medal by an Olympian almost guaranteed that the fighter would be a good and successful pro, but now it means almost the opposite.

However, because of Stevenson's high profile, cultural influence, good looks and big right hand, he seems to get the benefit in most hypothetical match ups. Personally, I believe this is more a case of guys trying to come off smarter than they really are. They think by coming up with an unconventional point of view it will project them to others as being someone who is a deep thinker.

Give me a break. If you need to go out on a limb in order to make yourself look as if you're the one who has the real insight, you don't know what you don't know.

Let me be clear, Teofilo Stevenson was a great amateur and had he turned pro after the 1976 Games he would've had his first pro bout in early 1977. Therefore he would've had a good shot to win a piece of the heavyweight title. By early 1977 "Smokin" Joe Frazier was gone, George Foreman was months away from being out-boxed by Jimmy Young and then retiring, and Muhammad Ali only had two successful title defenses left in his reserve. Then again there is a problem out there looming named Larry Holmes. Holmes wasn't a great amateur, but he was an all-time great pro. So it's not like Stevenson is a given to make it to the top of the heavyweight ranks as a pro in the mid to late 1970s.

Most chose to forget that before Stevenson won his first gold medal in 1972, he lost to Duane Bobick at the 1971 Pan Am games. That was the same Bobick who a green amateur named Ron Lyle knocked out in the first round with one punch earlier that year. What is never mentioned is the fact that Bobick was favored over Stevenson until he got nailed with the best right hand Stevenson ever landed at the 1972 Games. Also, Stevenson wasn't unbeatable as an amateur fighter. Russian Igor Vystotsky beat Stevenson twice. The first time they fought Igor stopped Teofilo and when they met a second time, Stevenson lost a decision and at one point during the fight literally turned his back and ran from Vysotsky. How many times did you ever see Ali do that?

The reason why Stevenson didn't fight Vysotsky at the 1976 Games was because Igor was a bleeder and the Russian coaches feared he'd get cut before the medal rounds and therefore the

LOTIERZO'S LOWDOWN No, Stevenson Would Not Have Beaten Ali

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Monday, 30 July 2012 11:32

Russians wouldn't have competed for a medal at heavyweight. So the Russian coaches never sent Vysotsky to the Olympics. Also, Vystotsky lost to his countryman Angel Milan, and Americans Jimmy Clark and Greg Page, yet Stevenson couldn't beat him once in two tries.

Stylistically, Stevenson had a nice straight left jab and a big right hand. However, his uppercuts and hooks were nice set up punches but certainly not finishing shots. He was adequate but not great when he had to move his feet trying to catch an elusive opponent and preferred luring them into him, which he did successfully. Also, his money punch was his right hand, the one punch Ali was almost impossible to hit with any regularity. Stevenson's stamina was never tested and he was out boxed for gaps of his bouts against American amateurs Michael Dokes, Marvin Stinson and Jimmy Clark. And as we know they weren't nearly as resourceful, strong, fast or as mentally tough and durable as Muhammad Ali was.

There were talks of Ali and Stevenson fighting that almost came to fruition. Ali wanted to fight Teofilo in his retirement bout. Fidel Castro was close to being on board with it because by 1978 Ali was washed up and Stevenson was still at the top of his physical skill. The only hang up was, Ali wanted the fight to be 10 rounds or he wasn't interested. When Stevenson/Castro countered that they were only willing to consent to a three round bout, Ali scoffed and said something like, "Well, he really is just an amateur." So the fight never happened.

Oh, after Stevenson won his second gold medal, Castro invited Latin American hero and great undisputed lightweight champion Roberto Duran to come to Cuba and watch Stevenson train and spar. When Teofilo finished his workout, Castro asked how he thought he'd do against Ali and Duran replied, "Ali kill him"!

Just because Roberto Duran thinks an elder Ali would've handled Stevenson doesn't mean it's a gimme. However, Ali achieved too much and was too tough and versatile to be defeated by a big strong amateur who's only chance to win was by landing a lottery right hand. Stevenson couldn't hold up under Vystosky's assault, a fighter Ali once sparred in street clothes during his trip to Russia in 1978 and left the ring unmarked while wearing no head gear.

Again, it makes for different copy to write how Teofilo Stevenson could've been Muhammad Ali's foil, but in the real world it's a massive reach. I mean, come on, there's no chance Stevenson could've knocked out even an old Ali. Maybe for three or four rounds he could've stayed with Ali circa 1977-78, but that's about it.

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Monday, 30 July 2012 11:32

Ali wasn't infallible as a fighter, but he had everything a fighter needed to beat Stevenson in a pro bout. As great as Stevenson was as an amateur, it's a joke to say he could've been Ali's equal. There's just not enough evidence to support that theory. Only hyperbole.

You wanna talk about an interesting hypothetical bout? How about 1968 heavyweight gold medal winner George Foreman versus 1972 heavyweight gold medal winner Teofilo Stevenson?

[Comment on this article](#)

Matthew says:

Spot on. While Stevenson is undoubtedly the greatest amateur heavyweight of all time, on the surface it's hard to imagine he could have beaten even the post-Manila version of Ali. It's even less likely when you look below the surface. Stevenson never fought beyond three rounds. You can train all you want, but until you've gone the championship distance, you don't know if you can or not. We'll never know if Stevenson could have or not. We do know that Ali, even when not in prime condition, could find a reservoir of will to get him through, and we know he could take a grenade to the chin and stay upright. Even with declining physical skills, those qualities would be enough to beat the great Cuban.

dino da vinci says:

Ladies and Gentlemen, Frank Lotierzo.

The fact that the counterproposal was for nine minutes speaks volumes. Pro fighters debuting start at twelve minutes. If you compete in three Olympics, you're a pro masquerading as an amateur.

Coxs Corner says:

Yes I enjoyed watching Stevenson and he would have been an interesting prospect as a pro but he had no hopes of beating Ali had Castro let him jump right into a bout with Ali for a big payday. Had Stevenson been brought along at a normal pace turning pro in 77 he would have been ready for a title shot in perhaps 80 where he could have beaten John Tate/Mike Weaver and won a piece of the title. But he would not have beaten the polished Larry Holmes of 81 that beat Cooney. Stevenson -Cooney might have been interesting but I can't imagine that fight ever coming off in this hypothetical scenario.

deepwater says:

LOTIERZO'S LOWDOWN No, Stevenson Would Not Have Beaten Ali

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Monday, 30 July 2012 11:32

No one knows who would of won because no one has a crystal ball. I would bet stevenson would beat ali in a 3 round amatuer contest and I would bet Ali would of won over 12 rounds in the pro game. So my opinion and \$2.50 will get you a mug of mcsorleys over at mcsorleys on the lower east side. The only thing you can do is watch some tape on the guys.watching stevenson perform is something special. watch for yourself and come to your own conclussions. Forman said is best when watching , he is a champion in every way and if he turned pro the heavyweight division would be different.

Radam G says:

Stevenson was a nine-minute punching machine. The GOAT Ali was a 15-round whip-a\$\$, dancing master of triple disaster. In an amateur Stevenson would have been a match for the GOAT, but not in the pros. Holla!

tlig says:

Ali-Stevenson would have been a spectacle in the mould of Michael Johnson V Donovan Bailey (1997) or that awful James Toney fight with some MMA dude. A curiosity that should have remained in our imagination and never made a reality. It would have been a joke.

I doubt Stevenson at that point could have even beaten any of the guys in the top ten of the division in a pro fight.

That said, I am convinced he would have made an excellent pro if brought along properly (10 to 15 fights max since he was already so good) and gone on to win the championship, just not right out of the amateurs. As for the dream match-up between him and 1968 Foreman (as ammys), he'd have beaten George in my opinion. A more interesting match-up would have been Lennox Lewis V Foreman. The amateur Lewis was raw and powerful and generally just overpowered guys and Foreman was crude and did pretty much the same thing- would have been a great bout.