

Reflections on Fury-Cunningham

Written by Thomas Hauser
Monday, 22 April 2013 17:25



Tyson Fury makes a good villain.

Fury is a braggart who calls himself “the best fighter in the world.” To the casual observer, he comes across as an obnoxious big-mouthed lout. As of this writing, the 6-foot-9-inch Brit (or is he is bit shorter than he claims?) has compiled a 21-0 (15 KOs) record against mostly club-fight-level opposition. On April 20th, he made his American debut in New York.

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Fury's latest designated victim, Steve Cunningham, was three months shy of his 37th birthday. Cunningham has now lost four of his last five fights and hasn't beaten a credible opponent since toppling cruiserweight Marco Huck in 2007.

Fury tipped the scales at 254 and outweighed Cunningham by 44 pounds.

The bout was in The Theater at Madison Square Garden. Main Events (Cunningham's promoter) kept the NBC license fee. Team Fury got the British TV money (which explained why the fight was scheduled for 4:00 PM instead of that night). The costs associated with renting The Garden were split evenly between the two camps.

It was an exciting fight. An inartful first round saw Cunningham missing with wild overhand rights and Fury bringing his jab back slowly and low. As the fighters made their way to their respective corners at the close of the stanza, Tyson conspicuously and gratuitously shoved Cunningham. It wasn't a bump; it was a shove. A hard one. Referee Eddie Cotton should have taken a point away on the spot. Instead, he let the matter pass, which was a clear signal to Fury that the rules didn't fully apply to him.

Prior to the bout, Fury had come across like a high school bully who torments smaller boys in school. One hoped that Little Steve would punch the bully in the nose and make the him run away.

Ten seconds into round two, that seemed possible. Fury threw a sloppy jab, and Cunningham responded with a right that was straight enough to land flush on the big man's jaw.

Fury went down flat on his back with a thud.

"What were you thinking when you got knocked down?" he was asked afterward.

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“You don’t think of things when you’re lying flat in your back,” Fury answered. “You get back up.”

At the count of six, he did just that.

Thereafter, Fury used his size well and turned the bout into a brawl. His constant aggression and wild swinging punches forced Cunningham to trade with him to the smaller man’s disadvantage. Equally important, Eddie Cotton allowed Tyson to lead with his shoulder, forearm, and elbow; push down on the back of Cunningham’s head; and otherwise illegally rough Steve up (headlocks are illegal in boxing).

In sum; Cotton lost control of the fight. Although if one were being cynical, one might say that the referee was controlling the fight precisely the way he wanted to. Indeed, at one point when Fury seemed a bit buzzed by another blow, Cotton stopped the action to give him an inappropriately-timed warning for fouling (which afforded Tyson time to recover).

In round five, a head-butt by Fury cost him a one-point deduction. But by then, Cunningham was weakening and the momentum of the bout had shifted irrevocably in Tyson’s favor. Whatever modicum of respect he might have had for Cunningham’s punching power was gone, and he was firing his own punches with abandon.

The start of round six was delayed while trainer Naazm Richardson sloooowwwly repaired some loose tape on Cunningham’s glove. That confirmed the obvious; that Steve was exhausted and would have a hard time surviving the second half of the fight.

The end came in round seven. With forty seconds left in the stanza, a paralyzing right uppercut to the body forced Cunningham to the ropes. Fury then moved in and finished his opponent off, setting up a final crushing right hand by jamming his left forearm into the smaller man’s throat and pushing his head directly into the line of fire.

Two judges had Cunningham ahead on points 57-55 at the time of the stoppage. The third judge had matters even.

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“I hunted him down like a lion hunts down a deer,” Fury proclaimed afterward. “In a dog fight, the bigger stronger dog always wins.”

“He did what he was supposed to do,” Cunningham acknowledged. “He put his weight on me. He kept leaning on me and leaning on me. It felt like I was fighting two people.” Then Cunningham added, “He can fight, but he did it dirty.”

So . . . What should we make of Tyson Fury?

First, give Fury credit for getting in the ring. All fighters deserve that. He was in good condition against Cunningham, fought a physical fight at a fast pace, and showed a fighting spirit. He’s fun to watch, less so to listen to. It would be interesting to know whether he’s a jerk in person or if his public persona is just an act. Perhaps it’s a bit of both.

Meanwhile, the heavyweight division is thin enough that Fury stands a reasonable chance of becoming a beltholder some day. Whether he can become a champion is another matter.

Fury’s partisans would like to see their man in the ring against Wladimir Klitschko. In their view, Tyson’s size, free-swinging style, and roughhouse tactics would bother Wladimir. It’s likely that Wladimir’s skill and punching power would bother Fury more.

Either way, Fury versus Klitschko would be fun to watch while it lasted. If Fury got blasted out, that would be entertaining too.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His next book (*Thomas Hauser on Sports: Remembering the Journey*) will be published by the University of Arkansas Press later this spring.

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deepwater says:

haha now Steve Cunningham is 37 year old bum, where was that before the fight. Villain? I was excited to see an actual heavyweight prizefight. a big man that talks like John L Sullivan, has a gypsy boxing pedigree, and comes to bring it back alley style! skill wise is one thing, a big guy who likes to fight, mix it up and fight a lil dirty will get my \$ for a ticket any day. headbutts and fouls are a way to buy time Ala Tito Trinidad. while you are busy fantasizing what kind of guy Fury is you had an opportunity to go to the after party at the pub, next time you should go. My friends were at the after party and said Fury was having a ball and being very nice to everyone. some guy even beat him in an arm wrestling match at the pub. in the world of boxing it is not bragging if you can back it up. Klitcos style gets them the victories but it is like watching paint dry . klitcho vs Fury would be huge. HUGE p.s. mayweather uses his elbow to break the rules more then fury so remember that next time Floyd fights.

Carmine Cas says:

Vladimir would put him to sleep with the straight right. But the bout would be definitely entertaining while it lasted. Tyson has a promo-table persona, I'd like to see him fight David Haye as well. The pre-fight hype alone would be thrilling. Did anyone see his cousin fight afterwards? He's not bad, the future seems better for the HW division. Now all we need is Bryant Jennings and Bronze Bomber to make statements

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Good post Deepwater me and u r on the same page with this one.

deepwater says:

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I saw it. hughie beat up an mma guy with shaved eyebrows. 3 knockdowns in round 1 and ref stopped it.

gibola says:

I've seen most of Fury's fights and he can box sensibly, he did when he won every round against Kevin Johnson. I think the hype and desire to make an impression on US TV got to Fury and that's why he looked as sloppy as he did. Haye would have KO'd Fury on Saturday but I'm with the others on this page - there are flaws but so what? A big guy who talks and fights and takes risks - what's not to like? I think if he just calms it down a tad he could give Wlad big problems with his power and physicality. Either way it would be fun and after a decade of Wlad-enforced boredom a fun, go-for-broke heavyweight is exactly what we need. I'm a FuryFan.

PS - The trashtalking is a gimmick, he does it before every fight and then he's gracious afterwards.

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Fury didn't respect the "lil" guy. Thought he could walk straight thru him and he paid the price.....eventually he did walk thru him.

He'll be more scientific against WK.

Radam G says:

Just you guys will know, especially the xenophobic and ethnocentric haters, in the genes of Irish Tyson Fury sits greatness. His getting knocked down by Steve "USS" Cunningham reminds me of Irish Cassius Clay getting drop by Henry Cooper. And Tyson's showmanship also reminds me of his Irish-blooded distant cousins who were both world heavyweight champion.

People ought to KNOW before they BLOW! They hated the young Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali for the smack talk, and they have apparently forgotten about his singing. WOW! Anyway! Check out some genealogy and history! GOAT Ali learned to smack-and-trash talk from his Irish grandpa who was a third cousin -- one time remove -- of Irish John L. Sullivan, who, as TSS superstar reader/poster Deepwater indicated above, was the original ARTMASTER of pugilistic SMACK and TRASH talk. So now comes Irish Tyson Fury, who is a sixth cousin of GOAT Ali

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C'mon TSS super Investigative Journalist S-To, do what you do and help a P-playa help! If anybody can prove me right -- which I am -- or wrong, it will be you. I give you a high five and no jive. Boxing is "The theatre of the unexpected." Well so is genealogy.

To all the haters, posers, busters, ethnocentric whackos, xenophobic nutcases and _____, I'm calling it NOW! Tyson Fury is on the same road that -- Irish John L. Sullivan and Irish [GOAT] Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali -- his distant cousins and fellow dudes of his ethnicity were on to becoming a FAMOUS, world-known heavyweight champion of the world. Holla!

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The heavyweight champ should say he will fight any guy in the house. The heavyweight champ of the world should be known in every country. Klitcho can walk into any bar and say I will keep my distance and jab any guy in the house. wlad is getting soft and might not be able to lean on fury like he did haye.

Shazz says:

I personally dislike this kind of mismatches.

As we've observed over the past 10 years with the Klitschos, The size difference and

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advantages it gives stack the odds far too deeply to the fighter with the size advantage. The size becomes predictable and as also true with the Klitschoks and undersized opponents, boring.

There should be no doubt that there is no Cruiserweight fighter today who can effectively move up to heavyweight and be as competitive as Evander Holyfield. Cunningham's physique may look like Holyfield, but there is no question that Cunningham is definitely not Evander Holyfield.

Fury, in my mind still has not proven much to me except that he can compete and be just a tad better than a Cruiserweight he outweighs by 44 pounds and exceeds in height by 5-6 inches.

Still waiting to see Fury in a high level competitive match-up.

deepwater says:

Makes me respect Holyfield even more. Look at those Mercer Bowe Lewis fights. Prime Holy beats Klitcko.

tlig says:

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[QUOTE=deepwater;29495]Makes me respect Holyfield even more. Look at those Mercer Bowe Lewis fights. Prime Holy beats Klitcko.[/QUOTE]

I respect Holyfield myself but people are forgetting when he moved up 25+ years ago heavyweights weren't as big as they are these days. Holy was awesome no doubt and I know this would sound sacrilegious but in [B]five [/B]fights against guys of similar size to today's heavyweights (3 with Bowe and 2 with Lewis) he only won one.

Guys like Fury, both Klitschkos et al may not be particularly skilled but their size is real and [U]no[/U] former cruiser walks through them.

People forget - or don't even know- how ordinary Holyfield's reign as undisputed champ was (struggled with old fat guys like Holmes and Foreman and almost got KO'd by Cooper). The respect he earned for the fight with Bowe wasn't for his skill but his heart in taking a bad beating and continuing to try to find a way to win.

Radam G says:

They were BIG 25+ years ago. And that is when the phony division of cruiserweight came

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about. And a lot of moola in all divisions. Please no need for excuse making. Conningskunk -- I mean Cunningham -- was just one sorry-arse punk. Holla!

tlig says:

I'm definitely not making excuses for him; as you know I picked him to lose the fight. I also agree that they were big back then but certainly not as big as they are these days. You are talking big athletic guys (solid 250lbs and above + 6 feet 5 inches and above) with skills. About the best similar sized man in 1988 was Tony Tucker and he weighed much less than these guys (actually fought as a light-heavy in the amateurs) and in my opinion wasn't as good as the Klits.

If Holyfield moved up today, I dare say, it would have been a much different story.

Radam G says:

Even in the late 1960s, the late, great Smokin' Joe Frazier fought 250lbs-plus, 6-foot-5 and a half Buster Mathis. Wow! And in the 1970s through 1990s that list is LONG of athletic heavies over 250lbs and more than 6-foot-6. Holla at FightFax and even Boxrec. The game has always been that way with Jesse Willard winning the world title belt in 1915 and Primo Canera winning it in the 1920s. Even a gaint African won one of the world heavyweight title belts in the early 1990s or late 1980s. Holla!

mortcola says:

Fury is tall and strong. He is somewhat crude, has a questionable chin, and has been bullied and dropped by MUCH smaller men before winning on heart and the sheer power that comes from his 6'9" frame. He stands a good chance of being stopped before he ever gets a Klitschko. As for Deepwater's comment about Wlad getting soft, I remind you that he threw nearly a thousand punches against a 6'8" power puncher who turned out to be 'roided. Fury has no more than a remote puncher's chance against Wlad, having nothing resembling Wach's chin. At least he keeps it entertaining.

Radam G says:

Hey Doc Mort, let me remind you that what you said about Tyson, the experts and loyal fans said the same about Tyson's loud-mouth distant cousin Cassius Clay did almost a half of century ago. That hotshot, loud mouth of Irish descent got knock down three times in fights against weak opposition before he beat the "Night Train" Sonny Liston.

History loves to repeats itself. Holla!

ali says:

Fury is a much better fighter then what we saw last Saturday trust me. He just didn't respect Cunningham because he was a much smaller fighter if he ever fights one of the Klits he will show y'all he's the truth like Paul Peirce.