

The Top 10 Most Significant Super Middleweight Title Bouts...FARHOOD

Written by Steve Farhood
Thursday, 08 December 2011 10:11



On December 17, every eye in boxing will be glued to the super middleweight battle between WBA titlist Andre Ward and WBC titlist Carl Froch, who will clash in Atlantic City in The Final of the Super Six World Boxing Classic.

The super middleweight division was born in 1984, when Scotland's Murray Sutherland was crowned IBF champion. Since then, many of the greatest fighters of their generation, including Sugar Ray Leonard, Thomas Hearn, Roy Jones, James Toney, and Joe Calzaghe, have engaged in 168-pound title bouts.

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Ward-Froch will be the 76th unification bout in boxing, and the sixth at super middleweight. Given the immense stakes, it will be one of the most critical contests in the division's 27-year history.

To date, the 10 most significant super middleweight title bouts:

1. Roy Jones W 12 James Toney, November 18, 1994, Las Vegas (Jones retains IBF title):

Those who insist Jones ducked the best available opposition conveniently choose to forget this fight. Toney, 44-0-2, is ranked second pound-for-pound, Jones, 26-0, seventh. Toney drains himself making weight, rehydrates until he is a bag of water, and performs accordingly. Jones scores a knockdown in round three en route to a clear-cut decision win.

2. Sugar Ray Leonard D 12 Thomas Hearns, June 12, 1989, Las Vegas (Leonard retains WBC title; Hearns retains WBO title):

The legends are rematched eight years after their historic unification battle at welterweight. While both are past their primes, they produce a thrilling duel, with Leonard, 35-1, suffering knockdowns in rounds three and 11, and Hearns, 46-3, barely surviving round 12. Almost no one agrees with the decision, including Leonard, whose thought before the announcement of the decision is, "The only uncertainty left was the margin of [my] defeat."

3. Joe Calzaghe W 12 Mikkel Kessler, November 3, 2007, Cardiff, Wales (Calzaghe retains WBO title, wins WBC and WBA Super titles):

The Welshman and the Dane fight for three belts before a crowd of almost 50,000 at Millennium Stadium. In a crisply fought bout, Kessler, 39-0, is stronger for five rounds, but Calzaghe, 43-0, rallies to take a well-received unanimous decision. Having made 21 defenses, Calzaghe is finally recognized as a legitimately great fighter. "I had plans for this fight," Kessler says, "but he just crushed my dreams."

4. Nigel Benn D 12 Chris Eubank, October 9, 1993, Manchester, England (Benn retains WBC title; Eubank retains WBO title):

Like Leonard and Hearns before them, bitter British rivals Benn, 37-2, and Eubank, 35-0-1, are rematched at a higher weight. (In a 1990 title fight at

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middleweight, Eubank stopped Benn in nine rounds.) The second bout, fought before 42,000 on sacred grounds at Old Trafford Stadium, is a disappointment, with neither fighter willing to take the chances that marked their pulsating first encounter. As it turns out, a point lost by Benn for punching low costs him the win.

5. Sugar Ray Leonard KO 9 Don Lalonde, November 7, 1988, Las Vegas (Leonard wins newly created WBC super middleweight title and WBC light heavyweight title): Fighting for only the third time in 6 1/2 years, Sugar Ray, 34-1, becomes the first boxer in history to win world titles at five different weights. The naturally bigger Lalonde, 31-2, drops Leonard with a right hand in the fourth, but Sugar Ray rebounds to punish the Canadian champion and brutally finish him in the ninth.

6. Joe Calzaghe W 12 Jeff Lacy, March 4, 2006, Manchester, England (Calzaghe retains WBO title, wins IBF title): Despite Calzaghe's credentials and home field advantage, the powerpunching Lacy, 21-0, is the betting favorite. The bettors are dead-wrong; the southpaw Calzaghe, 40-0, dominates with speed and sharp punching and wins virtually every round. "Long before the finish," writes Brian Doogan in "The Ring," "it had become almost unbearable to watch [Lacy] suffer such a beating."

7. Andre Ward Technical Win 11 Mikkel Kessler, November 21, 2009, Oakland (Ward wins WBA title): In the opening round of Showtime's Super Six tournament, 2004 Olympic gold medalist Ward, 20-0, making a mammoth jump in class, scores an upset, chopping up longtime titlist and tournament co-favorite Kessler, 42-1. The ringside doctor halts the bout because of a butt-induced cut over Kessler's right eye.

8. James Toney KO 9 Iran Barkley, February 13, 1993, Las Vegas (Toney wins IBF title): Toney, 33-0-2, becomes a two-division champion with a career-best performance. He utterly dominates Barkley, 30-7, who is two fights removed from defeating Thomas Hearns for a second time. When referee Richard Steele intervenes, Barkley's left eye is closed, his right cheek is swollen, and he's bleeding from the nose and mouth.

9. Sven Ottke W 12 Byron Mitchell, March 15, 2003, Berlin (Ottke retains IBF title, wins WBA title): As is often the case, Ottke, 34-0, benefits from home cooking, edging American puncher Mitchell, 25-1-1, by split decision in a unification match. Moving in and out, the German utilizes a pitty-pat attack and survives a rocky moment in the final round.

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10.Mikkel Kessler W 12 Carl Froch, April 24, 2010, Herning, Denmark (Regains WBC title):

In one of the outstanding bouts of the year, Kessler, 42-2, rejuvenates his career--and strengthens his standing in the Super Six tournament-- by edging Froch, 26-0, by unanimous decision. There is little to choose between the two (scores of 117-111, 116-112, and 115-113), but in the later rounds, Kessler is clearly invigorated by the crowd's support.

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Radam G says:

Nice! But for 10B, I will put down Tommy Hearns-James "The Heat" Kinchen. Tommy was on a comeback after getting whopped by Iran Barkley, I believe. The Hitman got a gifted majority decision over The Heat. Holla!

Condor says:

The tragic Nigel Benn - Gerald McClellan war in February of 1995 deserves a spot, in my opinion.

brownsugar says:

your so right Condor... by coincidence, after reading a story on another site several days ago about McClellan I watched the fight on youtube. Gerald was something like 31-2-1 with 29 ko's and 20 first round ko's (they weren't all against bums but a fair number of good fighters as well) As you know he blasted Nigel Benn out of the ring in round 1 but had to fend off an amazing rally from Benn who simply refused to back down. Nigel was so hurt in round eight(or was it 9) it was a miracle he stayed on his feet. he half lept, half staggered into McClellan with a nasty head butt to Gerald's eye,... every time he touched the eye after that McClellan had to take a knee, wether the punch was hard or not. One of the hardest fought fights I ever saw.. with two of possibly the most dangerous supermiddleweights I ever saw.

That a TOP fighter like McClellan would go to England was amazing in itself with guys like Jones, Toney and Bhop content to stay on home turf... incredible fight... and like you said,.. an ending that could bring tears to your eyes... McClellan slipped into a coma and lost his memory, sight, and 80 percent of his hearing. He can still hear enough to talk and carry on a simple basic conversation. I'm thinking it was a pre-existing condition that was exacerbated by the brutal action. Gerald paid a high price... but yeah,.. a very significant fight, and a very intense contest. McClellan was one of the hardest punchers I've ever witnessed.. it's a terrible tragedy that he couldn't continue his career.

brownsugar says:

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Leonard vs Lalonde was a catchweight fight designed to add another title to Leonards inventory...no I'm not mad at him,.. but it was a paper creation. Leonard Hearn II was okay,.. but it was significant only in the sense that it brought another reunion between everybodys favorite rivals. I won't bother to mention Ottke, the most protected fighter of them all. All the other picks are on point,.. except Calzaghe vs Bhop should have been on the list,... oops... they were fighting at light-heavy.

Grimm says:

[QUOTE=brownsugar;11397]I'm thinking it was a pre-existing condition that was exacerbated by the brutal action.[/QUOTE]

Indeed, and hence why McClellan let his mouthpiece hang out. In the aftermath, it is obvious he felt something was wrong. But as stated: what a fight, an epic battle, that surely would be mentioned as a true classic more often if it weren't for that ending.

As a european, I followed Benn from early on, and man - he was a beast, so savage during his most ferocious years he should be compared with the likes of Graziano.

dino da vinci says:

No shortage of talent there. He did fight in the States relatively early on in his career, but upon becoming a star he never did to return Stateside to show off his wares. You would of thought Benn would have been a bigger star internationally.

brownsugar says:

@Grimm,.. cool photo,... if I remember correctly you were a member of the TSS before the "Great Change"... I remember you contributing some very relevant and compelling stuff...back in the days.

I can't believe I missed the whole Benn era. Must've been in the early years of my 1st marriage or something(too busy raising a family). But watching it again and reliving the history thru the Benn-McClellan documentary was one of the most powerfully and compelling true stories I've seen in some time.

McClellan was known as one of the most mean spirited fighters in boxing, he was said to be a fighter who craved destroying his opponent in the ring.

Benn was branded as the ultimate "BadBoy" Athlete, with his illicit activities(stories about wild drug binge-ing orgy parties) making front page news in the local press. But when it came to fight time... Benn had the mentality of a gun-powder fed Pitt-Bull.

The media had McClellan picked to destroy Benn within 3 rounds. (McClellan had never had to go past 8 rounds before, all his 29 wins were by KO)

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Blame was passed all around after the fight, Gerald's family implicated Benn and the Ref equally as being 1st degree murderers,.. Nigel said he just did his job, the ref said he didn't speak English but he spoke boxing and said it was Gerald's corner's business to throw in the towel.

The Commission said "this guy has a 100% KO record how could we know this could happen?"

His corner said "it's our job to lift Gerald off the stool and throw him back in there".

It took 12 years for the wounds to start healing. Benn threw a fundraiser for McClellan

Most of the readers here like Condor and Grimm probably know all this stuff well, but it's the first time I stumbled upon it.

Emmanuel Stewart said McClellan wanted to be his own boss and fired Stewart because in addition to being his own boss he wanted to pocket the manager/trainer fees for himself.

Stewart still showed the wounds from the separation on the documentary,.. but he keeps his comments as discreet as possible,.. and refuses to go into detail,.. although his visible agitation speaks loudly to the bitterness he felt about the way Gerald chose to part ways with him.

McClellan's corner was also blamed and labeled as the consummate definition of unprofessionalism.....McClellan himself was quoted as saying "I wrap my own hands because the clowns in my corner can't do it right".

Benn said in so many words he was a thrill seeker and enjoyed both the aggression and the fear of fighting (meaning it was a rush to challenging his own personal fear and doubt in a fight). But he also said that he "Had to win that fight, I needed the money".

Benn was rude, crass, flamboyant and charismatic... but he was a pure fighter... never label him a boxer.

Most of the media had the same impression of the fight,... They were all saying it played out more like a Hollywood Movie than a real fight.until the ending reminded everybody that falling into a coma wasn't in the script.

Condor says:

Hey Brownsugar, I've always been fascinated by this fight. There was a book written about it called "War, Baby" by Kevin Mitchell (kind of an odd title but from it captured the essence of the violence of that night). You can kindle it for under \$10 on Amazon.

I remember that mid-90's era more and more fondly with the passage of time. That fight had phenomenal electricity. McClellan had beaten RJJ and Michael Moorer as an amateur, and was at the absolute top of his game. Bruno and Hamed were friggin' pounding on the canvas at

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times during that fight. I wish I could remember all the tidbits from that book. I just glanced at it. GM was a dogfighter (some nasty details here). This was big-time pre-Vick, but no secret. Some grisly stories are recounted that make Vick look like a saint.

McClellan was in dire physical straits from the middle rounds on. He had that wild blinking going and his mouth was wide open. In addition to all the leather, heads were clashing in there full force. I don't know if you saw the Showtime broadcast on youtube, but Ferdie Pacheco was highly critical of McClellan, basically said he quit (no clear shots knocked him down when he took those knees; just the bleeding on the brain finally prevailed and he collapsed).

Anyway, you should check that book out man. You can read a preview there too.

brownsugar says:

Condor I'm still looking it up on youtube vids and googling articles about it... I'm probably better off getting the book. I've heard some peripheral stuff about the incident thru the years but never bothered to actually read up on it until now. Hollywood has produced far less significant biographies about other athletes. I read about some of the gruesome accounts of GM's appetite for pitt bull fighting. I'm sure I'll be picking up book. thanks.

gibola says:

The second Eubank v Watson fight mirrors the Benn-McClellan fight in that it rarely gets talked about because of the injuries Watson sustained, but watch that fight it's easily one of the top 5, never mind top ten. They had both moved up to SM after their first fight at 160. This was for the vac WBO title but the fight is just fantastic, though sadly Watson paid too great a price.

brownsugar says:

Thanks for the suggestion gibola,.. checked it out on youtube yesterday, what an awesome fight. and another bad ending.