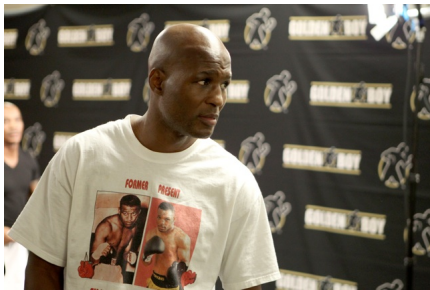


The Top Five Biggest Bouts in D.C. History

Written by Aaron Tallent

Friday, 28 February 2014 11:43



Bernard Hopkins' (54-6-2, 32 KOs) light heavyweight title unification bout with Beibut Shumenov (14-1, 9 KOs) is going to be one of the biggest bouts Washington, D.C., has seen in years. It is certainly the most hyped bout the D.C. Armory has hosted.

"When I was in Washington (on Jan. 25) promoting the Lamont Peterson (junior welterweight title) fight at the Armory, the people there showed me a lot of love and respect," Hopkins told ESPN last week. "I got mad respect for the fans there and they got mad respect for me in D.C. Fighting in D.C. is like fighting in Philly as far as I'm concerned. It will definitely be a Bernard Hopkins house and I will give them something to cheer about."

The comparison with Philadelphia boxing is the ultimate compliment from the boxer formerly known as "The Executioner," who's fought a few major bouts in Washington. The sport has had its highs and lows in both cities, but right now is a great time to be a boxing fan in D.C.

During those moments of high popularity, Washington has hosted some big-time fights. Some of lived up to their hype. Some have not. Here is the top five.

5. Mike Tyson vs. Kevin McBride, MCI Center, June 11, 2005

The fact that this fight was even a big deal is a testament to the state of boxing at the time. Tyson was years removed from greatness and was coming off a fourth-round knockout loss to Danny Williams in Louisville, Ky., 11 months earlier. McBride was his handpicked opponent to get him back on track. It was not to be. The MCI (now Verizon) Center crowd instead saw McBride dominate the fight and Tyson called it a day and a career at the end of the sixth. McBride then proceeded to go 2-6 in his final eight fights.

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4. Andrew Council vs. Keith Holmes, William Joppy vs. Julio Cesar Green, MCI Center, September 24, 1999

It is hard to beat hometown favorites fighting for titles in their hometowns. In this co-headlined bout, D.C. native Keith Holmes successfully defended his WBC Middleweight title with a unanimous decision over Washingtonian Andrew Council. Then, William Joppy pleased his hometown crowd by stopping Julio Cesar Green on cuts in the seventh round in a rubber match to retain his WBA Middleweight title. Joppy would lose his belt to Felix Trinidad in 2001. Ironically, Holmes lost his to Hopkins in 2001 as well.

3. Joe Louis vs. Buddy Baer, Griffith Stadium, May 23, 1941

One of the members of Louis' "Bum-of-the-Month Club" was the brother of former heavyweight champion Max Baer. While he wasn't in the class of fighters of his brother, Baer was solid and had just come of a stoppage of "Two Ton" Tony Galento at the D.C.'s Uline Arena a month earlier. When he faced Louis, Baer put him on the canvas in the first round, but Louis quickly took control. The "Brown Bomber" dropped him three times in the sixth round. When the last knockdown came close to the bell, Baer's manager, Ancil Hoffman, came into the ring to protest and refused to leave, causing his fighter to be disqualified. The two met again seven months later in Madison Square Garden and Louis knocked Baer out in the first round.

2. Muhammad Ali vs. Jimmy Young, Capital Centre, Landover, Md., April 30, 1976

Every major city seemed to be building arenas and stadiums in the suburbs during the 1970s and 80s so Landover, which is about nine miles from D.C. and a stop on the metro line, makes this list. This bout would be one of many controversial decisions that Ali won between 1976 and 1978. In Young, he faced a fighter who frustrated the best of the era with superb speed and technical skills. Ali showed up unprepared and overweight and Young exposed "The Greatest's" technical flaws. While Ali still had his moments, Young dictated the pace of the fight. When the unanimous decision was announced in favor of Ali, the reaction was most certainly mixed.

1. Riddick Bowe vs. Jesse Ferguson, Roy Jones, Jr. vs. Bernard Hopkins, RFK Stadium, May 22, 1993

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The only fight card ever held at RFK hosted a defense by the most physically gifted heavyweight champion of the 1990s who also made his home in Maryland and a championship fight from the two top contenders who would go on to become two of the greatest middleweights of all time. Riddick Bowe made quick work of Jesse Ferguson, knocking him out 17 seconds into the second round. Roy Jones won the vacant IBF Middleweight title with a unanimous decision over Hopkins, who would have to wait almost 17 years to get his revenge. Sadly, the attendance did not live up to the hype, as only 9,000 people attended.

The coming months will tell where Hopkins/Shumenov falls on this list. My guess is that if it doesn't crack the top five, it will definitely be an honorable mention.

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King Beef says:

The city came out in force for Mike that night, but he was already done fighting way before that fight. I thought my cousin (big Tyson fan) was gonna try to get in the ring and try to help him!!!!

ArneK. says:

Nice piece. Have always been interested in the geography of boxing. One of the weirdest books in my library of boxing books is by an ex-vaudevillian turned Washington D.C. burlesque house manager: Jimmy Lake. After D.C. legalized boxing in 1934, Lake became the preeminent ring announcer in the area, holding that distinction for more than two decades. He did Louis-Baer I. If you wanted to expand this list to a six-pack, Lake (were he still alive) would nominate the 1939 featherweight title fight at Griffith Stadium between Joey Archibald and Harry Jeffra. Archibald, who was from Providence, was managed by Al Weill and trained by Charlie Goldman, the fellows who would go on to guide the career of Rocky Marciano. Their guy Archibald won a split decision that was so unpopular that there was nearly a riot. The ref, by the way, was the great Benny Leonard, the former lightweight champion. One can be excused for omitting this fight from a list of significant D.C. fights. As champions go, Archibald was a flash in the pan. He lost 26 of his last 36 fights. But for a very brief time he was the generally recognized featherweight champ -- and it happened in Washington DC.

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