From 1991 to 1994, James Toney was arguably the best fighter in the world pound-for-pound. This self described 'old-school' fighter mowed down everyone in his path from 160 to 168 pounds.

Whether he was catching up to the then unbeaten Michael Nunn, surgically taking apart Iran Barkley, knocking out Tim Littles on a rounds notice with a cut threatening to halt his bout, or his patient display of body work off the ropes against Prince Charles Williams, Toney was putting together a Hall-of-Fame career.

That is until one November night in 1994, when a grossly out of condition Toney would get easily out-boxed by an upstart named Roy Jones. Jones would go on to become boxing's next superstar and ascend to heights that many thought were reserved for Toney. As for the brash Toney, well, he'd scuffle around in the ensuing years losing two controversial decisions to Montell Griffin at light heavyweight and then finally bottoming out when he would get out-hustled by journeynman Drake Thadzi in 1997.

By 1998, Toney, who was once a sleek and athletic middleweight/super middleweight was walking around in the high (and I mean high, 280's). It was the most grotesque public weight gain since Anna Nicole Smith. How something that was once so beautiful and functional could go to waste, was appalling. You'd see him at various club shows around Southern California and he'd be unrecognizable. His career was put on hold; and in addition to that, he would have numerous personal issues to work out, including a well-publisized lawsuit against his own mother.

Well, fast forward to 2002 and Toney is on the brink of returning to the big-time. If he should beat Jason Robinson this Sunday night, he'll be in line to take on IBF cruiserweight champion Vassiliy Jirov. He sure sunk a long way down in 1998 from his best days in the early 90's, now he's miles from the abyss he was in just four years ago. Toney says he's now re-focused on boxing.
" It wasn't a point where I got burnt out, I had a lot of personal things in my life that was going on," explained Toney, after his workout at Freddie Roach's Wild Card Boxing Club last week." Boxing, was not my main priority, it was just something I did to try and stay in shape because boxing's natural to me. Boxing, is natural, boxing, you just can't learn to box. Boxing's like a natural ability, it's been in my family. Eddie Futch trained my daddy, I didn't know that till recently, so I know where all my skills come from."

Toney, has always been one of boxing' colorful characters and one of it's best interviews. Don't expect him to pull his punches with any reporters, tired cliche's aren't in his arsenal. He was and still is, a reporters best friend. But many of those reporters in recent years had forgotten about him (and some would say with good reason) and his name long ago stopped appearing on pound-for-pound listings.

" You know what?," asked Toney rhetorically, when asked if his exclusion from those lists bothered him."
People that bring up certain names , that don't bring up my name, they don't know what the hell they're talking about in boxing. Like I said, 95-percent of the people who write about the game of boxing, they've never done it before or they played around with the game but they never knew what it's like to be inside the ring. When it's life and death situation. People like Jim Lampley, Max Kellerman's sorry ass, a lot of people in the game who call boxing matches on TV, they've never done the game before. So if you never have lived it, you can't talk about it."

So are you saying James that guys like us need to get in the ring and go a few rounds?
" They need to get their ass in the ring with a real world-class fighter and see what it's like to be on the short end of the stick," asserts Toney."
And what I mean by that, like you're tired, your arms are heavy, you ain't got nowhere to go. That's what a reporter has to do in order to learn the game of boxing. You can't just go,' Ok, I watched a couple of fights with my dad in the 40's and 50's and all of a sudden I'm a boxing expert.'

" I know so much more about the game of boxing, I can out-match anybody in wits as far as back in the day, anytime, anywhere. If you want to get in the ring with me talking about the history of boxing, come down, sit with me and I'll be I win everytime- everytime."

Hey, maybe doing some color commentary after he's done fighting is in his future?
" Well, I don't think people would like me too much because I tell the truth," states Toney, the former IBF middleweight and super-middleweight champion."
That would definitely be a problem because as you know, Jim Lampley and everyone else on HBO and Showtime, they kiss a lot of ass, try to keep people happy. Not me. I'm gonna tell it like it is, if a fighter sucks, I'm gonna say it. If a guys trainer is terrible, I'm gonna say it.

" And if you look at the game of boxing today, you don't have too many good trainers out there. Emanuel Steward? He's an OK trainer, but he's not a great trainer.
He's a highly paid cheerleader.

You got the real trainers like Freddie Roach, you got Teddy Atlas, he's a good trainer, you got Tommy Brooks, he's a good trainer and I think Buddy McGirts a good trainer because he's a fighter. He knows what it's like to be a fighter. Being in that ring he knows how to train his fighters for certain fights."

Hey, so maybe training is in his future?
" Nope," said Toney." I have no patience. Once I'm done with the game, I done with the game. I'm not the kind of person that likes to holler at people. If they don't do things my way, I don't have the patience for it and I'm not going to sit up here and embarrass this kid, like some trainers be doing- I'm not going to do that. If I do become a trainer, I'm gonna be laid back like Freddie. But right now, I don't have the mentality to do that. I'm gonna sit back and be a fan of the game."

In that case, we better enjoy him while he's here.
It's good to have him back.