

Sports Pace

Designation of pound-for-pound best is folly

By Huel Washington
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Gone are the days when boxing champions like Joe Louis used to say, "It was just another lucky night" after defeating an opponent in the first round or "He was a good fighter and I would like to fight him again." Humble recognition of talent of one's opponent was given by the victors during those days as an understanding of the time and effort taken to step into the ring and match skills of someone perhaps more talented.

Following Louis came Henry Armstrong, Sugar Ray Robinson, Jersey Joe Walcott, Ezzard Charles, Rocky Marciano, Chalky Wright, Willie Pep and Archie Moore, just to name a few of the superb battlers whose exploits in the squared circle thrilled millions around the world.

Since they were in different weight classes, very few of these fighters compared their skills with those in the other divisions.

Robinson started fighting professionally in 1940 out of the New York Golden Gloves as a lightweight. He won the amateur title as a featherweight. And when he finally turned in his gloves, after 202 bouts, his official weight was 165 pounds. Although he attempted to take the light heavyweight crown from Joey Maxim one hot day at Madison Square Garden on June 25, 1952, he never declared he was the best fighter in the world.

Both Louis and Robinson were from Detroit's Brewster Center, where many prominent fighters got their start. Robinson, whose real name was Walker Smith, moved to New York with his family and that's where he ended up in the Golden Gloves. He took the name Ray Robinson as his ring moniker to get started.

But as both fighters progressed toward world titles, boxing experts never attempted to compare Robinson's craftiness and speed with Louis' slow, methodical but powerful punches. That would have been unheard of in those days. The skills needed to take one crown were so much different than winning the other.

Yet, in today's boxing world, the so-called experts have come up with a comparison of fighters in the various weight classes called "best fighter pound for pound ever in the world," producing various conversations around sports books and water coolers in the workplace.

First of all, today's fighters only fight or defend their titles once or twice in a year. Some of them have been fighting professionally for 10 or 12 years and have fewer than 50 fights. For instance, Floyd Mayweather Jr., who last week defeated DeMarcus "Chop Chop" Corley, has fought 32 times since turning professional in 1996. He is undefeated and claims he has beaten everyone from 130 pounds to 140 pounds.

After turning pro on Oct. 4, 1940 until Feb. 5, 1943, Robinson won 40 bouts before losing a close decision to Jake LaMotta in Detroit. He defeated LaMotta three weeks

later in Detroit. He won 91 consecutive times before losing to Randy Turpin in London on July 10, 1951. He defeated Turpin on Sept. 12, 1951 in Madison Square Garden by TKO.

More than two weeks ago, at the Mandalay Bay Resort in Las Vegas, Antonio Tarver went bananas after knocking out Roy Jones Jr., who some had been touting as the "best pound for pound ever." Turning professional on Feb. 18, 1997 in Philadelphia, Tarver had only 22 bouts before meeting Jones the first time on Nov. 8, 2003.

Suddenly, Tarver defeated Jones, landing a punch that seemed to come out of nowhere. He had the nerve to start campaigning as the best pound for pound ever. "It takes a great fighter to beat a great fighter," he said. How much more of that do you want to hear? Hopefully, your answer is the same as mine — not much.

On June 5 in the MGM Garden Arena in Las Vegas, Oscar De La Hoya, who began a pro career after winning the USA's only gold medal at the 1992 Olympics, will meet Felix Sturm, 20-0. De La Hoya, who has a 36-3 record, has not fought since losing a controversial decision to Shane Mosley on Sept. 3, 2003.

In the co-feature that evening, Bernard Hopkins, 43-2-1, will defend his 160-pound titles against Robert Allen, 36-4. The winners of each bout will meet in September.

That would be three months between bouts for Hopkins and De La Hoya, if each should win. No plans have been announced if they should happen to lose.

On the other hand, Zab Judah, a junior welterweight champion from Brooklyn, New York, lost a close decision to Cory Spinks on April 10 at the Mandalay Bay Resort. Four weeks later he won a split-decision over Rafael Pineda on May 15 in the same ring.

Judah turned pro Sept. 20, 1996 and has a 31-2 record. He has had 12 fights in four years. He is from the old school and trained by Yoel, his father.

Joining Tarver and Mayweather in their fantasy about the best pound for pound also are Winky Wright (154), Kostya Tszyu (140), Erik Morales (130), James Toney (heavyweight) and the above mentioned Hopkins and De La Hoya.

Even though sports change form era to era, there are plenty of fight fans who would tell you that fighters like Louis, who defended the heavyweight title 25 times, would have danced through this current crop of "best pound for pound ever" in a couple of months. The same can be said of Robinson, who had 202 fights, and Moore, who had 218 fights.

These pretenders want to talk on television. Tarver, who had to claim bankruptcy before his big win over Jones, is guilty of this. He wouldn't have been in dire straits but for big spending and not working earnestly at his chosen trade. How about more fighting and less talking? A rematch between Jones and Tarver soon would give us the best two out of three.

Richardson felt he was doing well before firing

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) - Nolan Richardson testified at a trial on his discrimination lawsuit Monday that he had no reason to believe he would be fired as basketball coach for saying Arkansas could buy out his contract for \$500,000 a year.

Richardson said before a federal judge he believed he was performing satisfactorily despite his team's losing record, and he had wide latitude to speak his mind.

"I was always under the impression that I was doing my job," Richardson said. "It made it very easy for me to make those kinds of statements."

Arkansas fired Richardson on March 1, 2002, saying he had publicly expressed a lack of faith in the basketball program by saying he could be bought out. Richardson has said he did not want to be fired, but was let go because he is Black and outspoken.

The trial entered its third week Monday. U.S. District Judge William Wilson Jr. is hearing the trial without a jury and hopes to conclude testimony by June 1.

Richardson said he remarked publicly about being bought out because Kentucky media, after a Razorbacks loss in Lexington, asked him about contract negotiations he believed were secret.

Richardson signed a seven-year deal with the university in 2000 but in 2002 was negotiating a public appearance pact with its booster club.

The former coach also said that Chancellor John White and athletic director Frank Broyles misunderstood his remarks when they met Feb. 28, 2002 — four days after White had already decided to fire Richardson.

White and Broyles said in notes from the meeting that Richardson threatened to ruin Broyles' legacy and to return the state to the tumult of 1957, when President Eisenhower sent in federal troops to enforce a desegregation order for Little Rock schools.



Former Arkansas Razorbacks coach Nolan Richardson, who won an NCAA title in 1994, claims he was discriminated against.

tion order for Little Rock schools.

The men said they wanted Richardson to quit because firing him would hurt Richardson's legacy.

"I said, 'Black people really don't have a legacy, so I'm not worried,'" Richardson said. "I said 'The legacy you're talking about is Frank Broyles' legacy.' That's how I recall it."

Earlier Monday, a former congressman who served on the university's board of trustees testified it would have been wrong to keep the coach on board if he really wanted to leave.

Jay Dickey said university system president B. Alan Sugg told him in 2002 the school was firing Richardson because the coach had said numerous times he would leave Arkansas if it would buy out his \$1.03 million contract for \$500,000 a year.

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