

Boxing Ringside With Bobby Franklin

Tami Mauriello vs Joe Louis Short But Exciting

Tami Mauriello began his boxing career in 1939 fighting as a welterweight. He went undefeated in his first 24 fights before losing to the great Billy Soose by a split decision. He then went on an eight fight winning streak while moving up to the light heavyweight ranks where he earned a title shot in a bout with Gus Lesnevich. In only his second loss, Tami was robbed of the title coming out in the short end of a very unpopular decision.

Three months later the two would fight again and this time Lesnevich won a unanimous decision over Mauriello. After this loss Tami began his move into the heavyweight ranks. In his debut fight at the new weight he demolished Jay D Turner in the first round. Turner had nearly forty pounds on Tami but was no match for him.

Mauriello continued successfully campaigning at the heavier weight in hopes of landing a shot at champion Joe Louis. WWII put things on hold for Joe who was serving in the Army. Meanwhile, having scored wins over Gunnar Barland, Tony Musto, Red Burman, and a draw with Bob Pastor, In 1942 Tami was matched against Jimmy Bivins for the Interim Heavyweight Title. The fight with Bivins was a spirited affair with Jimmy gaining a 10 round split decision and the Interim Title.

Tami was back in the ring soon after scoring four wins including victories over Lou Nova and Lee Savold, he got another shot at Bivins. This time Jimmy won by a majority decision.



Tami on the attack against Lesnevich



Lou Nova sags after kayo loss while Tami Mauriello celebrates

Mauriello would have to wait a few years before getting another crack at a title, but he stayed busy. He fought 26 times before finally getting his shot at Joe Louis. Out of those 26 fights Tami won 24, losing only to Joe Baski and Lee Oma. He avenged the Oma defeat. He also beat Gunnar Barland, Lee Savold, and Lou Nova again, as well as knocking out British Champ Bruce Woodcock. He now was signed to fight Joe Louis.

Most observers felt that even an older Joe Louis who had recently returned from the Army and had won a long awaited but disappointing rematch over Billy Conn, would have no trouble with Tami. Yet, they also knew Mauriello possessed dynamite in his right hand, and there were distant memories of what Max Schmeling had done to Joe back in 1936, kayoing the Brown Bomber with overhand rights. Joe had learned from that loss, but could the fact that he had slowed down over the past ten years coupled with his inactivity because of the war make him vulnerable once again? That, coupled with the fact that Tami was a legitimate contender, was enough to make the match interesting to fans.

On September 18, 1946 the two stepped into the ring at Yankee Stadium before a crowd of 38,494 fans. The fight would last just a little over 2 minutes but there were fireworks.

Tami came to win and he went right after Joe. Many believe what happened in the opening seconds of the first round was just a lucky punch by Mauriello, but if you watch the film closely you will see Tami had a plan, though one he was able to follow through to completion.

At the bell the two came out of their corners with Joe stalking the challenger and Tami circling to his left. After just a few seconds Mauriello threw a wide left hook with caught Joe's attention. While Louis was distracted by that punch, Tami let go with solid straight right hand catching the Champion flush on the jaw. Louis shaken by the punch and appeared briefly to be hurt. The crowd went wild sensing a massive upset was in the works. However, Joe quickly regained his composure and tore into Mauriello who desperately tried to land a follow up right hand.



Tami lands the right on Louis

Joe then settled down and started landing short hard shots on Tami who went down twice, but all the time he fought back ferociously. At the 2:02 mark of the round the fight was over. The crowd felt they got their money's worth, and Tami would always be remembered for his booming right hand shot that connected.



Joe Lands a left hook that lifts Tami off his feet

It has to be noted that this was not a lucky punch. Tami's use of the decoy left hook was a strategy that nearly worked. He drew Joe's attention with the move which set up the opening for the right hand he threw. Mauriello was a very, very good fighter, and he knew what he was doing. He just couldn't follow up against the great Joe Louis.

Tami continued fighting until 1949 when he retired with a record of 82-13-1 including 60 wins by knockout. He was only stopped on 4 occasions. Movie fans will remember seeing him in the classic movie 'On The Waterfront' alongside Marlon Brando and Lee J. Cobb.

Tami Mauriello passed away on December 3, 1999 suffering from dementia caused by boxing, the fate that most fighters end up dealing with. He will always be remembered for his match with Louis, but should also get the respect he deserves for the stellar boxing career he had. Tami's right hand would tear up today's so-called heavyweight boxing division.