

A man for all reasons

Danny Green's next opponent has fought them all, Neil Devey reports

When you've flattened Superman and ended the career of Rocky, respect is not in short supply. But for Antonio Tarver it's as much the present as the past that is winning him the admiration of his peers — and nothing could make the lanky American happier.

Tarver, 42, and a four-time world light-heavyweight champion is in town on a whirlwind tour of Australia. He and Danny Green are hitting five cities in six days to help promote their fight for the WA man's IBO cruiserweight belt in Sydney on July 20.

The bout is Tarver's latest opportunity to beat the odds and write a new chapter in one of the sport's great tales.

It was seven years ago this week that the man from Florida thrust himself into superstardom by knocking out Roy Jones Jr inside two rounds of their rematch in Las Vegas. Tarver, written off as someone who got lucky in losing their first meeting by just a majority decision, had seethed resentment all through his preparation.

The frustration helped inspire one of boxing's biggest upsets — and one of its immortal one-liners.

"You got any excuses tonight, Roy?" Tarver sneered as the two fighters received their final instructions before the opening bell. Jones looked aghast. Soon after it was the boxing world that was open-mouthed as Tarver's left hook sent the self-proclaimed 'Superman' into orbit.

"Hahahaha, that was unbelievable," the father-of-two recalled yesterday. "I looked him dead in his eyes and he looked ghost white. He wasn't expecting me to say that. He wasn't expecting me to say anything."

"It came from the bottom of my heart. All through the training camp the critics gave him so many excuses, excuses, excuses. Excuses as to why I was even competitive in the first fight (Jones complained that he had lost weight too quickly when dropping from heavyweight to light-heavy). And they robbed me, they know they robbed me. So second time, it felt so sweet. Just to get in there and say, whatever happens tonight I'm going to knock you out. No excuse."

The win over Jones, and victory in their third and final rubber, made Tarver one of boxing's hottest properties. A latecomer to the professional game — he won a bronze medal at the 1996 Atlanta



Head to head: IBO cruiserweight champion Danny Green and American Antonio Tarver face off ahead of their July clash in Sydney. Picture: Michael O'Brien

Olympics aged 27 — suddenly new doors were opening, including the incredible chance to star in one of Hollywood's most successful franchises.

In 2006 Tarver got the call from Sylvester Stallone to appear in the sixth and final Rocky film — Rocky Balboa. This being the big screen, the fact Stallone's character was now in his late fifties was no bar to another crack at the world heavyweight title, although the Italian Stallion came up agonisingly short against Mason "the Line" Dixon, played by Tarver.

So how did it feel to end Rocky's career? Cue that laugh again.

"Hahahahaha, I never looked at it like that," Tarver said. "It was an incredible experience and after I retire I'm going to get back into acting."

That time in Hollywood temporarily turned Tarver's head and not long after he was handed probably the worst defeat of his career when he was outclassed by Bernard Hopkins. He later regained the world title, only to lose consecutive contests to Chad Dawson and as the last decade wound up, so it seemed had Tarver's fantastic career.

But a victorious return last October, at heavyweight, convinced him he still has a future

in the sport. As has his work as a knowledgeable ringside commentator with the Showtime boxing channel.

"I commented Shane Mosley-Pacquiao the other week, that was amazing," he said "As long as they have me that's where I see my future."

"It really shows me everything I should be doing in the ring. I have a complete understanding what they're (judges) looking for now, how you win rounds, how you make sure you're entertaining the crowds. Now I've just got to transform that from commentating into the fight."

"I'm surprised how the fighters

that we interview, how they respond to me too. It makes me feel good to know that I'm respected so much by my peers. When Pacquiao walks in and says 'Tarver' and gives you that big smile, because he knows you done something great in your career that he respects, it's a feelgood story. When I can look Sugar Shane (Mosley) in the face and ask him a direct question, 'what happened in the Mayweather fight?' and he can give you an honest answer, that tells me a lot. They respect. I've been there and they respect my opinion. It makes me feel good — it makes me feel that I did something right."

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Defying time: Bernard Hopkins

HOPKINS, 46, SHAPES UP FOR ANOTHER TITLE SHOT

History beckons for The Executioner

■ Montreal

At an age when most athletes are retired, coaching or lining their wallets signing autographs at the local shopping centre, Bernard Hopkins is one knockout from history.

If the 46-year-old defeats WBC light heavyweight champion Jean Pascal today in Montreal, boxing's golden oldie will dethrone George Foreman as the oldest boxer to win a world title.

Foreman was 45 years, 10 months when he knocked out heavyweight

champion Michael Moorer in 1994. Hopkins will be 46 years, four months and six days in his rematch with Pascal.

"You're dealing with the guy that's not the norm," Hopkins said. Hopkins has always been unconventional, and defeating Father Time, alongside Oscar De La Hoya, Felix Trinidad and Roy Jones Jr, may be his biggest achievement.

Hopkins has his blueprint for the next two years set. He plans to convincingly defeat Pascal, then fight three more times and retire as the champion. Of course, the call is out

of the same playbook written by a boxer who promised his mother he would retire at 40.

Hopkins (51-5-2) has something to prove after a lacklustre finish in the first Pascal bout.

The Haiti-born Pascal knocked down Hopkins in the first and third rounds. Pascal then tagged him with a left in the third to put him on the canvas.

Hopkins rallied, though, and won on the American judge's scorecard.

Judges from Canada and Belgium ruled for Pascal (26-1-1). The WBC ordered an immediate re-

match, in Pascal's home town. Known as "The Executioner", Hopkins realised he cannot leave the decision to the scorecard.

"I want to instigate and agitate a little bit up there," he said.

Foreman said he would be watching the fight and predicted Hopkins would win.

"I'm expecting Bernard to load up in the latter end of the fight, and go for the knockout, break that record, and break it fair and square where everybody can see it," Foreman said.

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