

Why Lennox vs. Vitali Is The Best Possible

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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It will be one year and two weeks since we last saw heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis in the ring when he defends his title against top ranked contender Vitali Klitschko on June 21st. The last time we saw Lewis in the ring, he was administering a beating to Mike Tyson so bad, it's doubtful he will ever recover psychologically from it.

Over the last fifty four weeks, the perception of Lewis has run the gamut. Shortly after defeating Tyson, Lewis was getting all due props. He was being regarded as the best heavyweight of his generation over Holyfield, Tyson, and Bowe (I happen to rank him behind Holyfield but, ahead of Tyson and Bowe). He went from being considered the man, to being accused of ducking some of the top challengers in line for a shot at his title. What I'd like to know is, exactly who is Lewis ducking, or who is so great out there that you'd want him to fight?

In most boxing circles throughout the world, the most clamored for, and anticipated fight in boxing was thought to have been Lennox Lewis vs. Wladimir Klitschko. Wladimir, the younger brother of Vitali was perceived to be the better fighter of the two. Wladimir gained much notoriety from his sixth round stoppage of the durable Ray Mercer last summer. Since Wlad was the first and only fighter to stop Mercer, many fans and media jumped on his bandwagon, I even had one writer tell me that Wlad was so good that he felt that it was quite possible that he may go on to even eclipse the accomplishments of Lewis! Yes, I laughed at him and still haven't let him forget what he said. What made the comment ludicrous to me was not that it wasn't possible but, the fact that it was made so emphatically because he stopped an old Ray Mercer.

Just as Wladimir Klitschko was gaining acceptance as the next heir apparent to the heavyweight throne, a funny thing happened on the way to heavyweight immortality, he got cracked on the chin. Yes, Corrie Sanders ruined the potentially biggest fight in boxing with his knockout of Klitschko, the same thing Buster Douglas did with his upset knockout of Mike Tyson back in 1990, killing the proposed Tyson-Holyfield title fight. Never let anyone convince you how great the next heavyweight killer coming up is going to be until you've seen him hit with a big shot on the chin. Now that Wladimir has been defeated and is out of the picture, the next best thing is his big brother Vitali. And we are lucky to be getting to see it five months early, and that's only because of a fluke injury to Kirk Johnson.

Lennox vs. Vitali is the best heavyweight fight that could've been made

After Lewis, the other three current title holders are, Chris Byrd-(IBF), Roy Jones-(WBA), and Corrie Sanders-(WBO), Lewis holds the WBC title. Looking at the other three title holders, who is Lewis avoiding? Chris Byrd and Roy Jones are just not big enough to be considered threats to Lewis. They would be at the mercy of Lewis' jab, so forget their edge in speed or boxing ability, they'd never be able to apply it. The best they could hope for is to make it through twelve rounds without getting stopped. I know I always say the super-big heavyweights are over-rated and they are but, Lewis is one of the few big ones who can fight. Byrd and Jones would be more a victim of the disadvantage they share in reach and height, than the weight advantage Lewis

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owns over them. Jones is 5'11" and Byrd is 6'0", that's somewhat short for a heavyweight regardless of era. That leaves Corrie Sanders. I guess it's possible he could sneak his straight left through Lewis' defense like he did Wladimir Klitschko's and possibly stop him, but I'd bet against it. Sanders is more than big enough to beat Lewis, however I just think Lewis is too versatile to lose to Sanders. I can live if I never see Lewis fight Sanders.

Including Vitali Klitschko, there are seven other heavyweights ranked in the top ten by the three major sanctioning bodies, they are. Hasim Rahman, does anyone really think Rahman wins the rubber match against Lewis? Mike Tyson, even Tyson doesn't believe he would beat Lewis in a rematch, nor does he want one. Evander Holyfield, only Holyfield believes he can win vs Lewis in a third fight, and nobody wants to see it. David Tua, after seeing Tua in his last fight vs Rahman, I have no doubt that a rematch with Lewis would be a rerun of their first fight. John Ruiz, the over-under on this fight would be two rounds. Kirk Johnson, we still may see this after Lewis fights Klitschko, if he wins. Last, is Fres Oquendo. I think it's safe to say we can all live without seeing a Lewis-Oquendo title fight. Fres has nothing to handle Lennox with, he can't out box, or out punch Lewis, no thanks.

After taking a closer look at the top contenders and title holders in the heavyweight division, it appears to me that because of fluke luck, (Johnson getting hurt) we are getting the best fight makable at the present time.

Since the Klitschko brothers turned pro in 1996, it's been said by many that Wladimir, Vitali's younger brother is the better fighter of the two. IBF heavyweight champion Chris Byrd, who has faced both the brothers, says that's not really true. Byrd said, "Wladimir fights more like an American fighter, which makes him easier to fight, (Byrd said he had an injury to his arm when he lost a decision to Wladimir). Byrd believes that Vitali is tougher to fight because he fights more like a European fighter, and is definitely a better puncher than Wladimir".

If Byrd is right, Vitali Klitschko should provide Lewis with quite a challenge. At 6'8", Vitali represents the biggest fighter that Lewis has ever faced. Under Emanuel Stewart Lewis has learned how use his size to his advantage. It will be interesting to see if Lewis can use Vitali's size to his disadvantage? Another intriguing aspect to this bout is, we know that Vitali can punch, and is big enough to be able to land on Lewis. Seeing that Lewis has been stopped by McCall and Rahman, is it a reach to envision Klitschko stopping Lewis?

Yes, this bout is a welcome surprise to boxing fans. It's a fight that is not a lock for either side. Lewis must be favored because of his experience, and it must be assumed that Lewis has thoroughly prepared for the fight. Let's not forget, Klitschko's never been in the ring with any fighter as formidable or complete as Lewis, and Lewis has faced and defeated better fighters than Vitali.

Looking at Klitschko's record, his best win was probably his 10th round TKO victory over Larry Donald, (who had never been stopped prior to fighting Klitschko) in his last fight on 11-23-2002 in Dortmund Germany. With Donald being the best fighter that Klitschko has defeated, this alone has to make Lewis more than a solid favorite in the fight but, not a lock!