What IF Bob Foster, one of the greatest light heavyweight champions in history, confronted Michael Spinks, also one of the greatest light heavyweights champs in history, when both were at their peak? One of the most intriguing facets of this match up is the size and style of the fighters. Foster was 6' 3" and Spinks was just over 6' 2", and both had reaches comparable to many great heavyweight champions past and present. Another thing they shared was the ability to box effectively while still carrying knockout power in either fist. One of the big differences between the careers of Foster and Spinks was that Spinks was more successful fighting as a heavyweight.

Bob Foster's first fighting experience came as an amateur fighting out of Albuquerque NM (his hometown). He also fought while serving in the Air Force. Foster was undefeated in over 100 amateur fights and won a berth on the 1959 Pan American Games team. Foster forfeited his goal of fighting in the 1960 Olympics when the only slot open to him was as a middleweight, because the light heavyweight berth went to Cassius Clay.(Foster said he couldn't get down to the 165-pound middleweight limit).

Bob Foster turned pro in 1961. He was mismanaged early in his career, resulting in Foster being matched with many of the better heavyweights who were more experienced and bigger than he was. Doug Jones stopped him in his 10th fight (Jones would go on to fight Cassius Clay five months after beating Foster). Losses to heavyweights Ernie Terrell and Zora Folley followed.

After losing to Folley, Foster ran off eight straight wins in the light heavyweight division, scoring seven knockouts. In his next fight Foster knocked out light heavyweight champ Dick Tiger in the fourth round. Foster's KO of Tiger was the only time Tiger was ever stopped in a long and brilliant career. After beating Tiger, Foster ran off 12 consecutive wins scoring 11 knockouts. In his 13th bout, he fought undefeated heavyweight champion "Smokin" Joe Frazier and was knocked out in the second round. After losing to Frazier, Foster won his next nine fights scoring eight knockouts. In his tenth fight, Foster faced former and future heavyweight champ Muhammad Ali and was knocked out in the eighth round. After losing to Ali, Foster never abandoned the light heavyweight division and fought for two more years.

Foster reigned as light heavyweight champ from May 1968 to August 1974 and in 15 world title fights, he went 14-0-1 (11). The draw came in his last defense against Argentine Jorge Ahumada. Foster only lost one fight as a light heavyweight, an eight round decision to Mauro Mina in his 13th fight. He retired as undefeated light heavyweight champion at age 36, and then made a comeback two years later going 5-2.

Michael Spinks compiled an overall amateur record of 93-7. He won a Gold Medal as a Middleweight in the 1976 Olympic Games. Spinks turned pro in 1977. After blazing through his first 16 fights, which included knockout wins over former light heavyweight champ Marvin Johnson and veteran Yaqui Lopez, he was the top ranked light heavyweight in the world.

In his 17th fight, Spinks would drop WBA light heavyweight champ Eddie Mustafa Muhammad (formerly Eddie Gregory) in the 12th round in route to winning a 15 round unanimous decision to capture the title. After making five successful defenses of the WBA title (winning all five by knockout), Spinks fought WBC champ Dwight Muhammad Qawi (formerly Dwight Braxton). In the most anticipated light heavyweight championship fight in boxing history, Spinks would score a unanimous decision over Qwai to become the undisputed light heavyweight champ, the first since Bob Foster.

Spinks would defend the unified title four times, winning three by knockout. After cleaning out the 175lb division, and hearing the call of the heavyweight dollars, Spinks set his site on trying to be the first light heavyweight champ to win the heavyweight title. Spinks relinquished his undisputed title as the undefeated champ, including an 11-0 (8) record in light heavyweight title fights.

Four months after giving up the 175 lb title, Spinks won a 15 round decision over the undefeated reigning IBF heavyweight champ Larry Holmes (becoming the first light heavyweight champ in boxing history to capture the heavyweight title). Seven months later, Spinks would defend the title against Holmes. In the rematch, Spinks won a controversial split decision over Holmes to retain the title.

Shortly after winning the rematch with Holmes, Spinks was stripped of the IBF title for not taking place in HBO's heavyweight unification tournament. Spinks would score two knockout wins, including a fifth round stoppage over the come backing Gerry Cooney before facing the tournament winner, Mike Tyson. A year after beating Cooney, Spinks would fight Tyson for the undisputed heavyweight title. In a fight similar to Frazier's destruction of Bob Foster, Tyson knocked Spinks out in the first round. It was the only time Spinks was beaten, or stopped in his 11-year pro career. A month after losing to Tyson, Spinks announced his retirement and never fought again.

Bob Foster and Michael Spinks are two of the most dominant light heavyweight champions in the 100-year history of the division. Foster possessed one of the most powerful punches ever seen on a light heavyweight, his left hook. The left hook of Foster left more than a few top fighters on the canvas for a count of well past 10. In more than a few fights, some thought the opponents were actually dead while they were being counted out; Dick Tiger, Vincente Rondon and Mike Quarry come to mind.

Foster also had a dynamite left jab, which carried knockout power and was capable of busting up the face of his opponent. Although it isn't often mentioned, Foster had KO power in his right hand. Foster was comfortable boxing at a distance or trading--either way he could get you. The only time Foster's chin ever betrayed him was in his bouts versus the upper tier heavyweights. No light heavyweight ever had him close to being stopped.

Michael Spinks was one of the most versatile light heavyweight champions in history. Like Foster, Spinks could box or punch. In fact, Spinks was even more adaptable than Foster. Spinks could fight moving away or moving forward, whereas Foster was only effective going forward. Spinks was effective fighting inside or outside. He also had knockout power in both

hands. He could take his opponents out with either his left hook or uppercut, and his right hand (The Spinks Jinx) was probably the hardest punch in the division since Foster's left hook. Spinks also had very underrated hand speed, especially on the inside. Another thing Spinks was very good at was adjusting to his opponents' style. Spinks could handle pressure, speed, counter punchers and punchers. He also had an outstanding chin. The only time Spinks was ever shook or stopped were in his fights with Holmes and Tyson.

**Who Would've Won?**

I have discussed this fight with many writers, historians and friends throughout the years. Trying to pick the winner between the two is a very close call. From a style vantage point, Foster may have a slight edge because of his jab. That being said, Spinks was definitely the fighter who was more capable of adjusting to varied styles. In this fight, I see Foster taking the lead, because he has to. Foster would push the fight with his jab, trying to force Spinks into his left hook. Spinks would most likely box moving away while looking to counter. If Foster keeps the fight outside, he probably wins, if Spinks can catch Foster coming in, he may be able to land the Jinx in hopes of slowing Foster down so he can come on down the stretch.

I'll say this; I think Spinks has the better-suited style to fighting in the heavyweight division, and can see why he was more successful against them. Spinks can neutralize a bigger fighter better than Foster because he doesn't have to meet their strength and power head on. In my opinion, Spinks is better against the heavyweights. However, I would probably pick Foster to win if they fought at 175 while both were in their prime--most likely by decision.