

What I Like About Chris Byrd

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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He stands barely over 6 feet tall, weighs somewhere between 208-214, can't punch, and nobody wants to fight him. Unbelievable! You would think in the era of the cumbersome super-sized heavyweight clinchers of today, Chris Byrd would be a marked man. In fact he is a marked man, marked to stay away from. The only fighters willing to get in the ring with Byrd, are the ones who can't get any other meaningful fights.

Not since the heyday of Jimmy Young of 1975-77 has the heavyweight division witnessed a fighter like Byrd. Like Young, Byrd is a master at using his opponents aggression against them. Also like Young, he's more than willing to fight all the top available contenders, despite spotting them size and power. It's a beautiful thing! A fighter who used to be a super-middleweight who cannot only compete with today's overfed heavyweights, but also be avoided by most of them.

Most complain that Byrd is not exciting to watch because of his lack of power, and that doesn't put anybody away. What most overlook is that he can fight, and knows exactly what he's doing in the ring. He's a boxer, it's as simple as that. Remember, boxing is the art of hitting and not getting hit. The problem is that just about every heavyweight fighting today, doesn't know how to keep him from boxing. What they want to do is make him fight, however they don't know how to go about it.

I think Byrd is a breath of fresh air in the heavyweight division at this time. I like that in the so-called era of super-sized heavyweights, it's a guy who would be considered small in almost any heavyweight era who is the most avoided. I appreciate his high skill level and his knowledge and insight on how he goes about breaking down the bigger fighters he faces. I've had the pleasure of talking with Chris Byrd on a few occasions, it doesn't take long for him to convey that he really knows what he's doing in that ring.

What else I love and respect about Byrd is that he's willing to fight any fighter anywhere. He went to the Klitschko's home turf and fought both brothers when no other fighters would. He fought Holyfield in Atlantic City where he never lost, and fought Tua when his only defeats were a razor thin decision to Ike Ibeabuchi, and a decision lost to Lennox Lewis when he was at the top of his game. Oh, I almost forgot, he fought Ibeabuchi too.

Look, I'm not saying he's the best heavyweight in the world today, but he is definitely one of the top three or four at the very least. And no, he's not undefeated, but who is? Show me a fighter who fights the best available fighters, and I'll show you a fighter who is not undefeated. Look at the heavyweight fighters of this era who are willing to fight the best fighters, Lewis, Holyfield, Tua, and Byrd, are any of them undefeated?

How can a heavyweight of about 210 be so competitive in the land of so-called giants? Look at who his defeats are against. Ike Ibeabuchi, who weighed 240 pounds and could box, had a good jab, a solid chin, and he could punch. Some said that Ibeabuchi was on his way of becoming the Sonny Liston of this era, a man among men. The fact that he was willing to fight

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Ike while he was on a major roll says more about him, than losing to him does.

His other defeat was to the 6'5" 240 pound Wladimir Klitschko. At the time Byrd fought Klitschko, he was being talked about as the heavyweight who would succeed Lennox Lewis. Plus, Klitschko had revenge on his mind since Byrd gave Wladimir's older brother Vitali his first defeat. Yet he still had no qualms about fighting him! Not bad, the only fighters who can claim victory over Byrd are, the fighter who many thought would succeed Lewis, (Klitschko) and the heavyweight who many felt, though somewhat premature, had the potential to be the best of the post Lewis era, (Ibeabuchi).

At this time, Chris Byrd is the best boxer in the heavyweight division and it's not even close. Don't give me Roy Jones, I need to see Jones fight more than one fight at heavyweight, and against the caliber heavyweight fighters Byrd has faced. Not just against Ruiz, who Byrd would've tortured just as easily and thoroughly as Jones did.

In looking at Byrd's loses to Ibeabuchi and Klitschko he was beaten by two things that most all heavyweights are vulnerable too, getting caught, and reach. Against Ibeabuchi, who can really hit, Byrd got caught with a big shot and was stopped. This is something that has happened to just about every heavyweight champion in history except Marciano, Tunney, and Ali.

Against Wladimir Klitschko, Byrd was basically beaten by Klitschko's long reach and jab. Reach is usually not an advantage if the shorter fighter knows how to get inside. The problem is that in most cases the fighter with the shorter reach is a swarming/pressure style fighter who makes his living fighting on the inside, such as Sharkey, Marciano, Frazier, and Tyson.

This is a problem for Byrd since he does his best work on the outside. He can fight on the inside but that's usually from a defensive mode. In Wladimir Klitschko, Byrd faced a fighter with an enormous reach advantage who knew how to use it. This is the one area where Byrd is very vulnerable, and why he could not beat Lennox Lewis.

In a fight against Lewis, Byrd would most likely be overcome by Lewis' jab. More so than Lewis' power and weight. By Lewis being busy with his jab, Byrd would not be able to get close enough to out speed or out score him. This is why he wouldn't win, not so much because of his lack of strength and power. Lewis could beat Byrd by just using his left hand, and there isn't anything Byrd could do about it.

Byrd, who is a comparatively small heavyweight, is a master at avoiding some of the most dangerous punchers in the world. Instead of going toe-to-toe with his opponents, Byrd piles up points with quick three and four punch flurries while moving out of harms way. Another thing Chris Byrd has mastered is relaxing in the ring. I haven't seen a heavyweight fighter who is so relaxed and loose in the ring since Jimmy Young and Muhammad Ali. Trying to hit Byrd hard is like trying to do damage hitting a sheet hung on a clothes line.

Byrd continues to prove that body stature and weight are small factors when you know what you're doing in the ring. With the exception of Ibeabuchi and Wladimir Klitschko, Byrd has proven time and time again that speed, balance, and brains can most often neutralize size and

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power.

The main reason most fighters give as to why they don't want to fight Byrd, is because he's hard to look good against. I think if you read between the lines, they're really saying they don't want to be embarrassed in the ring by him. Being embarrassed is something that fighters fear every bit as much as being knocked out. This is further testament to just how slick and cunning Byrd is in the ring. The other heavyweights know that they probably won't be hurt or knocked out by him, just humiliated.