

The Klitschko Brothers: Definite Lightning Rods

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Tuesday, 23 December 2003 18:00

Top ranked heavyweight contenders Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko are definitely lightning rods, just like Mike Tyson and Roy Jones. When speaking about Tyson and Jones with most fans, you get one of two views. Either Tyson at his best was the greatest heavyweight ever, and Jones at his best was the greatest pound-for-pound fighter of all time. Or, Tyson was an overrated front runner who was stopped by the best fighters he faced. And Jones was a big fish in a small pond, who fought during a very weak middleweight and light heavyweight era.

Obviously, both are over statements. Regardless of whether or not you like Tyson or Jones, or their fighting style, they must be given their due props. Tyson was a great heavyweight. Not one of the top ten of all time in my opinion, but none the less, he was a great heavyweight fighter. As far as Jones, he is not the greatest pound-for-pound fighter ever, but he is among them.

The same thing applies to Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko. I have found the reaction of some fans and writers is the same as it is with Tyson and Jones. When the Klitschko's are brought up and discussed, one of two themes evolves. Either they are both going to go down as two of the greatest and most dominant heavyweight champs in history. Or, they are both stiffs highlighting that Vitali is tough, but not skilled enough, and Wladimir is skilled, but doesn't have a sturdy chin. Again, both are over statements in my opinion.

There is no doubt that both Vitali and Wladimir are very formidable, and are forces to be reckoned with in today's heavyweight division. Most of the time when the Klitschko brothers are mentioned, it's their physical size that dominates the discussion? That's not how I see them. Yes, they are both big and strong, but I'm not from the school of thought that endorses the bigger is better myth. As far as I'm concerned, any true heavyweight is big enough to beat any of the so called big heavyweights currently fighting. And this has played itself out many times over. I actually believe that some of today's heavyweights are too big, and their size hinders and restricts their overall fighting ability.

One of the things I do love about both Klitschko's, but I never hear it mentioned, is their complete and total dedication to boxing and their willingness to learn and get better. Those are two traits that are sorely lacking in many of today's fighters, regardless of what weight division they campaign in. The Klitschko's are strictly business. They take boxing seriously and are well aware of its dangers. I'll bet their coaches and trainers can't recall the last time they missed a morning run, or had to be coaxed to go an extra round sparring or on the heavy bag.

That type of mind set puts them at a huge advantage over a majority of their heavyweight counterparts. It's quite obvious to me that these two guys really do eat, sleep, and drink boxing. They both have a goal, and that is to be heavyweight champion of the world. If it is never realized, it won't be due to a lack of effort on their part. These two guys don't squander any of their talent or abilities. What ever is in them, they get out.

This time last year it was wildly perceived that Wladimir was better than Vitali. Most felt this way

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because Wlad is the better boxer with quicker hands and better mobility. The perception of Wladimir being the better of the two fighters came crashing down on March 8th of this year.

When Corrie Sanders stopped Wladimir in the second round en-route to capturing his WBO title, The Wlad bandwagon lost its wheels. In the interim, older brother Vitali took the worlds best heavyweight, Lennox Lewis, to hell and back before being stopped in between the sixth and seventh rounds due to a severely cut eye. Since fighting Lewis for the title, Vitali has fought once. In that fight, he scored a devastating knockout over top contender Kirk Johnson in the second round. Since losing to Sanders, Wladimir has won two straight. Scoring knockouts over third tier heavyweights Fabio Moli and Dannel Nicholson.

As we enter the year 2004, Vitali is now viewed as the top heavyweight contender in the world and Wladimir is ranked somewhere between sixth and tenth. Great things are expected from both Vitali and Wladimir in the new year. The pressure is on both of them from their fans to at least win a piece of the heavyweight title. Some have even placed unwarranted pressure on them by making outlandish predictions declaring that they're both unbeatable, something we already know is not even close to being true or realistic. In fact, some have even gone as far as to say that they will both eclipse the accomplishments of Lennox Lewis. That I seriously doubt, but we'll see?

The Klitschko's do bring a lot to the ring, and it will take a damn good fighter to defeat either one of them in the new year. But don't think it can't happen. Wladimir is very skilled and he can hit. However, I still question his chin. I know in the heavyweight division that any fighter can get caught and stopped, but I can't get it out of my head totally that I'll never see him punched around the ring again like he was by Corrie Sanders. Even in his fight with Jamel McCline, Wladimir was only aggressive because McCline was just fighting enough to survive. But, I saw that when McCline did go on the offensive and got brave, Wladimir backed away. Some may say this is smart, but to me it's a mind set. A mind set that may suggest that he doesn't have the confidence needed to go to the next level. That being said, I believe Wladimir is a fighter that is more than good enough to win a piece of the title in today's heavyweight division. How much more than that can he accomplish, I'm not sure.

Vitali is an imposing fighter both physically and strategically. His huge size and strength will give most heavyweights a fit. On top of that he has shown to be extremely awkward and tough. His awkwardness and size alone will carry him past most of today's top heavyweights. His weakness is his lack of speed and that he can be out boxed. However, the boxer who can out box him must also posses strength and toughness, a combination that only Lennox Lewis seems to have. I see Vitali beating many of the worlds best heavies due to his size and how he utilizes it. Outside of Lewis, Vitali may very well be the most difficult fighter in the division to beat.

In 2004, I expect to see one of the Klitschko's capture a piece of the heavyweight title. Of the two brothers, I tend to think it will be Wladimir before Vitali. This is mainly due to my believing that we'll see Vitali fight a rematch with Lennox Lewis sometime in the first half of the new year. Since I think Lewis will beat Vitali and then retire, it would seem that Wladimir would get the next shot.

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The Klitschko brothers are both outstanding heavyweight fighters and deserve to be ranked among the best heavyweights in the world at this time. However, they are not the saviours of boxing or the heavyweight division that some have tried to paint them as being. And they are certainly not unbeatable. Especially since they've both already been defeated and stopped.

Overall, I think they are good for the flagship division in boxing. I respect their dedication and desire. They respect boxing and take it serious which is commendable. They are definitely a threat to beat any active heavyweight on any given night. I do think it's quite possible that Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko have their best nights in the ring in front of them. They will hoist a heavyweight title belt over their head down the road. That I'm sure most boxing and Klitschko fans can agree on.

What I don't agree with is that either one of them will go down as all time great heavyweight champions. As skilled as they are, it is unlikely that they'll ever be mentioned in the same vein as the legendary champions of the past. In fact, I don't think either one of them will ever go on to accomplish what Lennox Lewis has from 1993-2003. They are both outstanding fighters and not the cumbersome clods that some have tried to pass them off as being. They also are not the second coming of Joe Louis or Muhammad Ali!

I tend to look at both brothers in the framework of themselves, and when you do it that way, there are some things to criticize. However, when you compare them with what's out there, they rate very high, and probably match up favorably with everybody except a fit and determined Lewis.