

I Was Wrong.

Written by Steve Kim
Sunday, 07 December 2003 21:00

Last week I told you that Kirk Johnson would beat Vitaly Klitschko. Well, that goes right along with my predictions that 'Gigli' would be a box-office smash, that Members Only jackets would always be in style, that beta would be more popular than VHS and that Michael Jackson could be trusted with your kids.

Hey, when I'm wrong, I'm reaaaaally wrong. I don't go half way on anything I do.

Johnson would get blasted out in two short rounds, but the fight was lost way before he ever stepped into the ring at the famed Madison Square Garden on Saturday night.

I knew my powers of prognostication were in trouble when Johnson came in at a portly 260 pounds. This for a guy who seems to be a bit heavy at 245. His reasoning was that he had actually over trained for his bout with John Ruiz in July of 2002 and that he would never take a peek at the scales ever again. Then he said that Larry Holmes gave him some advice on not leaving your fight in the gym and how a few days off could be beneficial to your camp. I dunno, but I'm guessing that Johnson took any day that ended in 'y' rather lightly.

This was a classic case of a guy losing a fight in camp- where a lot of fights are actually decided. While Klitschko looked as fit as ever, Johnson's slovenly appearance told you all you needed to know. His handlers from Dino Duva, his promoter, to his manager Ken Lilien all reasoned that Johnson was actually much lighter but with the weigh-in being held outdoors in the cold weather that Johnson had several layers of clothing and jackets on.

Ok, but what were those jackets made off? Copper or brick? Seriously, it's pretty difficult to put on that much clothing so that it will actually weight THAT much. And if that were indeed the case, there have been many mummies that weren't wrapped up so tightly.

Now, I don't want to say that Johnson was out of shape, but stretch marks were visible on his body. His back was so big that when his fighting days are over he can use his back to show movies on at drive-in theaters. In fact, his appearance was so blimp-like that you got the sense that Goodyear would have been wise to sponsor him. And with his physical conditioning being so poor, he crashed like the Hindenburg.

No, he didn't out right quit like Buster Douglas did against Evander Holyfield or Bruce Seldon when he laid down versus Mike Tyson, he took some thumping, hard

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shots from Klitschko. But in not preparing at all for this fight, he did quit. Not necessarily in the ring the night of the fight, but when the fight was signed a few months ago. And that in itself is just as bad. He owed the game, the fans and more importantly, himself, a fair shot at winning this fight.

A fight that was the most important fight of his life. Remember, he was the guy that had to pull out of a bout with Lennox Lewis back in June, only to see Klitschko come in as a late replacement and fight valiantly in a sixth round TKO loss. It was a golden opportunity for Johnson that had slipped through his fingers but now, he'd be getting a shot at redemption against the very same guy who had seized his chance at glory.

So you think there would be a sense of urgency, right? A hungry and motivated Johnson, ready to put himself through hell to achieve his career goals, right. Uh, no, obviously not.

But it shouldn't be too much of a surprise the way things worked out. Johnson had garnered a million dollar signing bonus from Duva Boxing(through television mogul, Michael King) and had other money given to him by his handlers a year ago when he was a free agent and sitting on the top spot in the WBA rankings, with a shot at the eminently beatable John Ruiz in the near future.

Johnson, would be paid off for promise and potential and not actual production inside the ring. Remember, this is a guy that didn't exactly set the world on fire against Al Cole in two bouts, Larry Donald and got a bit lucky against Oleg Maskaev. But, he was a heavyweight, one with a title shot looming, people jumped over themselves to get a piece of the action.

All this for a guy that wasn't exactly the most diligent of workers to begin with. Seriously, if the guy wasn't going to be a dedicated worker before the millions rolled in, why would anyone think that things would change once he gained financial security without having to take a punch inside the ring?

The excuses made by his people in the aftermath of the weigh-in was par for the course. The bottom line is that they were in too deep to bail out now and they had to hope that he got lucky. In today's society, the truth is oftentimes too inconvenient and those who are honest when it's uncomfortable to be so, get jettisoned. Just ask Teddy Atlas, his former trainer, who's relationship was estranged because Atlas had the temerity to tell Johnson things that weren't to his liking.

But that's exactly what Johnson needed in the months prior to his fight with Klitschko. If he came in at 260 for the fight, one can only guess what he was weighing in the weeks and months leading up to the fight. It was at that point that someone should have had the gumption to tell Johnson the truth. Or perhaps they themselves really didn't care, maybe, after his June pullout, they just wanted to make sure that Johnson got to the starting gate this time around. Perhaps

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they were just cashing out and cutting their losses.

But I find that scenario unlikely since Duva Boxing had basically mortgaged their future on Johnson. They needed this win as badly as a drowning man needs a lifeguard. With Johnson drowning in his own gluttony, he may have taken Duva Boxing down with him.

Like all those who were involved with Johnson, I should have known better. There was simply too much evidence to the contrary that Johnson would beat Klitschko.

But unlike them, I really didn't have too much to lose.

BEWARE

Johnson like Derrick Gainer would have to post-pone fights this year because of torn left pectoral muscles.

Funny, based on the performances of both men, it does make you think, isn't the left pectoral very close to the heart?

I'm just saying.

KLITSCHKO

You gotta give big Vitaly credit, while Johnson was ill-prepared, Klitschko, coming off his horrific cut against Johnson was prepared and professional and he took care of business.

It's pretty clear now that Klitschko is now among the top five big men in the world. Industry sources believe that a rematch with Lewis would be a pay-per-view blockbuster that could do in excess of a million buys.