

## Homecoming

Written by Steve Kim  
Tuesday, 14 January 2003 21:00

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He comes from a 'Land Down Under'. No, I'm not talking about the band 'Men at Work' or their hit song of the 80's that became a second anthem for Australia. I'm speaking of one Kostya Tszyu who defends his undisputed jr. welterweight crown this weekend 'Down in Melbourne at the Telstra Dome against veteran James Jesse Leija.

For the past several years Tszyu had fought exclusively in the United States. And while he was a critical success in unifying the 140-pound division, he was a failure at the box-office. His unification bouts against Sharmba and Zab Mitchell and Judah failed to draw more than 3,500 and his last bout against Ben Tackie drew less than 1000 paid customers.

It was like the New York Yankees having the attendance

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of the Montreal  
Expos. I was there, and I  
would've sworn I heard some  
background crickets in the  
Bay Events Center at the Mandalay  
that night. in Las Vegas

While his reception  
has been lukewarm  
America, (at best) in  
now has Tszyu  
to show an opportunity  
of familiar in front his skills  
faces.  
And he realizes  
that it's a chance for him  
to change the perception  
that he simply can't  
sell tickets.

" It's a great thing and we  
need to show the world that  
crowds I can bring the big  
he said on an to the stadium,"  
conference call international  
we're expecting people last week."  
30 - 35,000 to be in the And  
going stadium. It's  
a very, to be very special  
event people which  
remember for a will  
long, long time."

It should be a raucous and  
spirited audience at the Telstra  
Azumah Nelson Dome- where  
once knocked  
out another favorite son

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people in Jeff of the Australian Fenech over  
a decade ago- appreciates and one that  
the soft-spoken of Tszyu. P the efforts  
Tszyu isn't simply cut  
out for American  
audiences. In an age of braggadocio  
and trash-talk, Tszyu  
follows the creed of who believed  
one Teddy Roosevelt softly and  
carrying in speaking a big stick.  
a foreigner And being certainly  
didn't help his  
either; cause and then  
when you factor  
in that most world-class  
only fight fighters two or  
three times  
a year, at the  
difficult most nowadays, it's  
up a fan to build  
region. your immediate base outside  
Perhaps he would have also been  
aided by having a Don King or  
his career instead Bob Arum guiding  
who a second tier promoter  
of pushing his seems incapable product above  
base. and beyond the core fan  
home and one But now he's  
battle is that he doesn't of the benefits  
jet-lag. have to

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" For the last few years I've been traveling to the States all the time," explained Tszyu;" and I got used to traveling and right now I feel great because you have to take five to seven days to adjust the time zones. This time I don't need to do this."

And not in an arena fighting arena be filled with empty seats that will and with some actual energy will only help his already sharp laser focus. And in Jesse he's facing a respected veteran whom he respects.

" I never take any fight lightly," he says." That's the reason why I'm training so hard for this. I'm sure Jesse's going to be an aggressive and exciting fighter; he's a warrior. I've watched many of his fights and even when he's lost some of his fights, he never gives up. That's the reason why I think he's going to be a great

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fight in front of my people." for me

And while Leija seems to be cannon fodder, he shouldn't be taken lightly.

Yeah, he's in his mid-30's and winding down his career- but so is Tszyu. And think about this, of Oscar De La Hoya in 1995, Leija has given a good account against every other boxer of himself against blue-chip he has run up against. He would go against. 2-1-1 against future Hall Nelson, he would give a respectable effort against Shane Mosley getting stopped in 1998 before late, he downed Ivan Robinson convincingly thought he was in 2000, many robbed against lightweight before that, highly ranked Juan Lazcano then he was on the verge of downing Hector Camacho Jr. before Camacho and he beat decided to quit, Micky Ward in his only appearance of 2002.

For Tszyu, Leija represents another challenge to his jr. welterweight

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supremacy and his goal of being consistently good time and time again. his goal was to unify his division, with that out of the way, he now focuses on staying king of the hill. " I think you need to defend your title when you climb to the top of the mountain," he says." You have to stay there; one mistake and it's a long way down. It's extra pressure but I learned to control and learned to control all the emotions and I can focus on one thing." And this time, there will actually be some people in the audience to witness it.

TAPIA TIME

I can honestly say I'm not the least bit surprised that Johnny Tapia has awakened from his coma after a weekend in intensive care and on a life support unit. It was quite a week for Tapia. First, on Friday night,

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standoff he was in a  
police against with his  
cousin that ended arrest  
with the of two  
men and Tapia given  
being a citation for possession  
of drug paraphernalia.  
And then on early Saturday  
morning his wife Teresa  
had to call 911 after  
he fell in his  
Las Vegas home and lost consciousness.

At that point it was thought  
that his life was in jeopardy-  
but remember, this  
guys been pronounced clinically  
dead three time before, so it  
surprise that should be no  
consciousness he regained  
on Monday afternoon.

But do the math,  
Tapia, who has  
battled substance  
years, abuse for  
more help. needs  
but it Sorry,  
fishy just sounds  
suddenly would that he  
and lose collapse  
a day consciousness  
having after  
drug paraphernalia.

And other sources tell me that  
Tapia had been going  
through some emotional  
distress since his bout with  
Marco Antonio Barrera in

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November.

From start to finish (whenever his life will  
that may be), always be a rocky  
road; hence the nickname,' (my crazy life).  
Mi Vida Loca' But it  
is clear that not  
only does he need more drug  
rehabilitation, but he  
could use  
also some psychiatric  
counseling.

LEWIS

Don't be stunned if Lennox Lewis  
decides to bypass a fight with  
and go right Vitaly Klitschko  
with Mike Tyson. ahead to a rematch  
Lewis and the  
promoter, Klitschko's  
Kohl, Peter  
far apart are still  
consummating that deal, in  
and if you really  
think about  
it, why  
would Lewis  
even agree to that  
bout?

After all, this is a guy that  
got knocked out by the likes  
of Oliver McCall and  
Hasim Rahman, why jeopardize  
a huge payday (in a much easier  
fight, no less)  
by taking on the hard-punching  
Klitschko?



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If McCall can starch and Rahman  
Lewis, it stands so could  
to reason Klitschko if he  
landed shot. a big  
Also, Lewis has been waffling  
on his decision for quite awhile,  
clear that he so it's pretty  
second thoughts himself is having  
big Ukranian. of facing the