

Lewis Decides To Go Out On Top At The Perfect Time

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Thursday, 05 February 2004 18:00

A few month's past I wrote why I thought Lewis-Klitschko II would happen. With the decision of Lewis to announce his retirement, apparently I was wrong. Good for him and bad for me. At this time I would like to thank Heavyweight Champ Lennox Lewis for announcing his retirement. Yes, I did say heavyweight champion. That is because as of his retiring he is the best heavyweight in the world, regardless of what belt he holds. Lewis is without a doubt the King of the heavies, and that includes both Klitschko's, Byrd, Sanders, Tyson, Rahman, Ruiz, Mesi, Guinn and any other contender you want to name.

I'm glad to finally see a heavyweight champ go out on top. It has only happened three times in heavyweight history with Jeffries, Tunney, and Marciano. Only Jeffries came back, and he lost to Jack Johnson six years after retiring undefeated. I hope Lewis doesn't make the same mistake. Who cares what writers write or what fans say? Let them call him a coward for not fighting Vitali Klitschko again, it means nothing. Any knowledgeable person knows that's not the case. And on top of that, Lewis already beat Klitschko in his last fight. So in reality he beat the next best heavyweight out there. I don't care that Klitschko was leading when the fight was stopped. He lost due to a severe cut inflicted on him from a punch thrown by Lewis.

Lewis and Vitali Klitschko fought, Lewis won, end of story. And if you are really an objective fan, you know Klitschko caught Lewis when he was in terrible shape, and still couldn't beat him. Vitali had Lewis on a night he was huffing and puffing, he was sloppy, over weight, and not focused, yet still couldn't get the win. Bottom line is Lewis beat Klitschko when he was at the end of his career, and Klitschko was at his best. Yes, I wouldn't mind seeing a rematch between Lewis and Vitali, however I don't need to see it to find out who the better fighter is, I already know, Lewis.

Hopefully Lewis can be a trend setter and make it fashionable to go out on top. In boxing this never happens in any weight division. Maybe this is why fighters don't receive the dignity and respect later in life that other athletes get. Boxing is the cruelest sport. When a fighter is at the end of his career, he usually gets humiliated in his last performances. It's not like a quarterback throwing interceptions, or a pitcher whose fast ball continuously gets jacked out of the park at the end of his career. Remember, you don't play boxing.

I think it's better that Lewis goes out under his own terms while he can. I don't want to see him get shellacked like Joe Louis, Muhammad Ali, Larry Holmes and Evander Holyfield. Ironically, Louis, Ali, and Holmes are the only heavyweight champs to win more championship fights than Lennox Lewis. I say lets celebrate Lewis. He was the champ for the better part of the past 10 years. He never met a fighter he couldn't defeat. He was a very versatile fighter and never embarrassed or disgraced boxing. Plus, he has plenty of money and should live like a reigning champ the rest of his life. Good for him!

There are only two negatives that can be said about Lewis, and they're not his fault. One is he is the only heavyweight champion to lose his title twice via one punch knockout while he was at

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or close to his prime. This will always cause some to question his chin. Two is that some will never give him credit for his defeats over the two other fighters of his generation that he is measured against, Holyfield and Tyson.

I thought Lewis beat Holyfield in both of their fights. However, I thought the rematch was very close. That being said, I rank Holyfield above Lewis in the all-time pantheon of heavyweight greats. I think at their best, Holyfield beats Lewis most likely by a decision. The Holyfield who Lewis beat was only capable of fighting in spurts. Not a good strategy to win a decision. Plus, Holyfield had a harder career and had tougher fights due to his willingness to go to war. And Holyfield is older than Lewis and fought every single fighter of their era who was supposed to be a somebody.

In regards to Tyson, I give Lewis total credit for his win over Tyson. In my opinion, Lewis at his best beats the best Tyson. Lewis is just too tall and long for Tyson, and has the power to take Tyson's heart. Lewis also never had any fear of Tyson. Lewis has to be ranked higher. He beat and fought fighters that Tyson never faced, and beat him head-to-head when they fought, and they are the same age. Oh, and Lewis never paid Tyson step aside money. Remember, Tyson paid Lewis 4-5 million \$ so he could fight Bruce Seldon for another ABC title instead of defending the title he currently held. That is pure fact and cannot be rebuked. I believe Tyson always had trepidation about fighting Lewis. I can't say it like it's a fact, but I just always got that feeling from Tyson. Bottom line, Lewis ranks above Tyson and was the better fighter.

Lennox Lewis has had an extraordinary career. He scored some devastating KO's, and was even at the wrong end of a couple of them. He never avoided any fighter and always sought to fight the best. I suppose in retirement he'll gain respect and be more appreciated like Larry Holmes and Evander Holyfield are, (As far as I'm concerned, Holyfield is retired and I know where his career was at its peak). Lewis, like many other past champs wasn't given his due as a fighter like Louis, Liston, Ali, Foreman, and Tyson, just to name a few while he was champ. Those mentioned were given their accolades while they were champ and were even thought to be unbeatable at some point during their title tenure.

Where does Lewis rank among heavyweight history's greatest champions. No doubt over the next few months many fans and writers will weigh in on this. I'm sure in the next week or so I'll take a stab at it. However, I can say without question, Lewis' career accomplishments rank among the top six or seven heavyweight career's of all-time. Personally, when I rank fighters on a head-to-head basis, I go pre and post Joe Louis, for many reasons. That being said, the overall career achievement's of Lennox Lewis place him among the top six or seven heavyweight champions in history. It's the head-to-head confrontations where I don't place him quite as high. But that's a story for another time.

This is a time to pay homage to the great career of Heavyweight Champion Lennox Lewis. I for one hope that he never comes back. He is aware that he is getting up in age and may be vulnerable if he ever fights again. Why should he risk losing to lesser fighters at the end of his career like so many other past greats have.

Lastly, Lewis is going out at the perfect time. He is recognized as the world's best heavyweight.

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In his last fight he beat the only heavyweight who was even thought to have a chance to beat him in Vitali Klitschko. Klitschko has demonstrated much class in his deportment since hearing of Lewis' retirement plans. I can't answer for anyone else, but as far as I'm concerned, Lewis is leaving at the perfect time, while he's on top. And I think he is too smart to ever come back

Writers Note

For those who want to admonish Lewis for his decision. Ask yourself this, isn't it better that he go out on his terms opposed to going out like Joe Louis, Muhammad Ali, or Evander Holyfield. I know their circumstances were different, but I can't help thinking Lewis is making the right move. I wish Louis would've never came back after beating Walcott in their rematch. I wish Ali would've retired after Shavers, or the second Spinks fight at the latest. Holyfield could've gone out many different times after a big win but didn't. Lewis goes out off of a big win, this will only help add to his legacy as the years go by. I wish more fighters and athletes cared about their legacy instead of milking out every last dollar. Lewis leaves with all his faculties and plenty of money. Good job Champ, and thanks for the memories!