Written by Frank Lotierzo
Monday, 12 April 2004 18:00

Earlier this week I spoke with IBF Heavyweight Champ Chris Byrd 37-2 (20) while he was training in Las Vegas. Byrd defends his title this coming Saturday April 17th against former title challenger Andrew Golota 38-4 (31). Chris Byrd is a very under appreciated fighter in today's Heavyweight division. He fights in a unique style that is predicated on timing and defense. He is not a "Catch and Kill" style fighter who goes out looking to end the fight with every punch he throws. Basically, he takes away his opponents strengths, in essence he takes the bullets out of their gun, reducing them sometimes to wild swinging amateurs.

Chris Byrd has one of the best resumes of any fighter in the Heavyweight division, and he has fought the absolute best of the best. He holds a win over the fighter currently perceived to be the one to succeed Lennox Lewis, Vitali Klitschko. He took the best puncher in the division to school and gave him a Boxing lesson, David Tua, and also decisioned Evander Holyfield to win the IBF title. Byrd has lost twice. However, that is not the mortal sin that some make it out to be. His defeats were to the two fighters who most boxing observers/experts anointed as being the future stars of the division in the late 90's, Ike Ibeabuchi and Wladimir Klitschko.

The only fighter of significance who Byrd hasn't fought is Lennox Lewis, and that wasn't because of him. Byrd has a tough fight in front of him in Andrew Golota. I'm not the biggest Golota advocate in the world, but I do recognize his skill and ability. This is no easy fight for Byrd, but as usual he's more than willing to face the challenge. Below are some of Chris' quick thoughts on Golota, Toney and Jones, and the size of today's Heavyweights.

Lotierzo: Chris you're fighting Andrew Golota this coming Saturday Night, Golota has only fought twice since quitting against Mike Tyson in October of 2000. Tell the readers and fans why Golota, and why should he leapfrog over some other contenders who have been active?

Byrd: He didn't leapfrog anyone. He was the only one who wanted to fight me. He is a credible guy with a name.

Lotierzo: In my opinion Golota is a difficult fight. He has some ability and power and basically has no pressure on him in this fight since most figure you should beat him. After seeing you change your style in your last fight versus Fres Oquendo, I think he is going to try and go to the ropes to draw you to him? You're not at your best fighting that style. If he does this, how will you neutralize him and get him to fight your fight?

Byrd: When someone holds as much as Oquendo it changes my style. I can't worry about pleasing people anymore. I need to keep it in the middle of the ring. That's how I make him fight my fight.

Lotierzo: Did you change your style on purpose in your last fight versus Oquendo, and why if

you did?

Byrd: Yes I did. I felt I had to make it an exciting fight and it still turned out ugly.

Lotierzo: I've read where some fans and writer's compare Golota to Wladimir Klitschko, a fighter who you lost a decision too in October of 2000. What do you think of that comparison?

Byrd: No Comparison

Lotierzo: Speaking of the Klitschko's, What do you think about those who deem Vitali as being the man to succeed Lennox Lewis?

Byrd: I say that's crazy, I beat him and I'm looking forward to doing that again.

Lotierzo: Now that Lennox Lewis has retired, do you think there is a chance of getting the three major Heavyweight Title's Unified?

Byrd: Maybe two but not all three

Lotierzo: Chris, today's Heavyweight are bigger than they've been in any other generation. I think the size factor is overrated, as you have proved during your career. What would you say to those who think that past greats wouldn't be big enough to be Champion today?

Byrd: To a certain degree I think size is overrated. With the heart, skill, and determination of fighters from the past I feel they could definitely compete in this era.

Lotierzo: Joe Mesi recently signed a three fight deal with HBO. How do you feel about that in the light that he hasn't really proven himself to be a true bona fide Heavyweight Contender?

Byrd: I was surprised they would do this when he hasn't fought anybody really in the top ten.

Lotierzo: Chris, You, James Toney and Roy Jones all get much praise for being fighters who basically started as middleweights, and have gone on to beat some former and current Heavyweight Champs. However, you are the only one who has proven to be a real factor in the Heavyweight division. Jones beat a handpicked Ruiz, and Toney beat a totally shot Holyfield and that's it. You have defeated Vitali Klitschko, Daivd Tua, Evander Holyfield, and Fres Oquendo, and have also fought Wladimir Klitschko and Ike Ibeabuchi. What goes through your mind when you hear them get so much praise for basically doing once, what you have done throughout your career?

Byrd: I don't care about the praise they get. That's good for them, their good fighters. But...they still have to prove themselves in this division against the top guys to be established as a true heavyweight.

Lotierzo: Today there is so much emphasis on punching power regarding the Heavyweights. As you know all Heavyweights can punch. Do you think some fans and writers are to enamored

with it, and it's not the be all end all that some pass it off as being?

Byrd: I think people do get caught up in it when they over look real skill in the division.

Lotierzo: Don King has been your promoter for almost two years now. How do you think your career is progressing under him?

Byrd: I think it's better than it was. I know it's hard to get guys to fight me and he's doing the best he can.

Lotierzo: Chris, who makes the determination on who you fight and has final say?

Byrd: My Lawyer, my wife, and myself. Everything has to and must come through me.

Lotierzo: Chris, Winky Wright just became the unified Jr. Middleweight Champ. Already the three major sanctioning bodies have mandatories stacked up which will be impossible to meet. Does this hurt Boxing not having unified champions?

Byrd: No, because guys like myself would just sit and wait and be in a long line waiting to get there chance. It would be hard to make a living.

Lotierzo: Mike Tyson is the latest former Champ who appears to be broke after making millions in the ring. Is there anything that can be done in your opinion to help protect some fighters from themselves?

Byrd: Yeah were all adults. Be responsible

Lotierzo: Recently I wrote an article saying that Jimmy Young could've competed favorably in today's Heavyweight division. Many including myself have made the correlation between you and Young. Have you seen many of Young's fights and what do you think are the differences between you and him, other than you won a piece of the title and he didn't?

Byrd: No, I haven't seen many of Young's fights. If he was a smart fighter with something special than he would have been able to compete.

Lotierzo: Chris, you are always seen at the major fights, I get the feeling that you Eat, Drink, and Sleep Boxing, am I wrong?

Byrd: No, you're not wrong. I love boxing. But, even though boxing is very important in my life, I put my faith in Jesus Christ, my wife and my kids first

Lotierzo: You recently did Television Commentary on the Bernard Hopkins-William Joppy Triple header in Atlantic City. Did you like it and is it something that you would like to get into when your through Boxing?

Byrd: I would LOVE to Commentate

Lotierzo: Follow up to the last question. Who do you think are the most fair and knowledgeable Boxing Commentators?

Byrd: Boxers who really know the Sport

Lotierzo: Had to ask this one, as redundant as it is. Who is your favorite fighter of all-time, and who is your favorite Heavyweight of all-time?

Byrd: I have so many I can't begin to name just one. Sorry

Lotierzo: Thanks Chris and good luck this Saturday night

Byrd: You're welcome Frank

I would like to thank Chris Byrd for his time during this hectic week. And also a thanks to Tracy Byrd for her hand in helping set up this Interview. The week of a Heavyweight Championship fight is very demanding on all parties involved. The Byrd's committed to this before hand and as usual stuck to their end of the bargain, and them some. I wish them all the luck in the World in this up coming fight.

Writers Note

This conversation took place shortly before the Wladimir Klitschko - Lamon Brewster fight. The question below is part of the question I asked him along with the one above regarding those that perceive Vitali Klitschko as the fighter most likely to succeed Lennox Lewis. Since it doesn't apply to this interview, I omitted it from the body of it. However, I thought I'd let you read his answer in the prism of how he thought prior to Wladimir being stopped by Brewster.

Lotierzo: Chris, What do you think about those who say Wladimir has a questionable chin?

Byrd: I think if anyone gets hit right their going to sleep. Just because he got caught by Sanders doesn't mean he has a questionable chin.