

## April Heavyweight Title Wrap Up

Written by Frank Lotierzo  
Thursday, 29 April 2004 18:00

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In the last fight of this mini Heavyweight tournament in the month of April, Vitali Klitschko stopped Corrie Sanders to capture the vacant WBC title. As it stands right now, there are four fighters who can go around claiming to be the Heavyweight Champ. The WBC is represented by Klitschko, the IBF by Chris Byrd, the WBA by John Ruiz, and the lightly regarded WBO by Lamon Brewster. Yes, we have four title holders but not a fighter who can claim to be The World Heavyweight Champion.

Being the Heavyweight Champ used to be the most prestigious honor in all of sports. Sadly, that isn't the case today. This topic has been beat to death over the last 6 or 7 months that some are bothered hearing it. That's just too bad. If you don't want to hear the truth, than cover your ears and stop watching Heavyweight boxing. The truth is that this division is awful. Downright awful! I watched all four fights with much hope and guarded enthusiasm. I was hoping to see one fighter stand out as the fighter who can really be something special or great. I didn't see him. There is not one Heavyweight in the World right now who can have the word great attached to his name when speaking of him. Vitali may be today's signature Heavyweight, but he hasn't approached greatness yet. Maybe in time, but not as of now.

Today, most point to the late 60's and 70's as being the Heavyweight Golden era. In order to get a true barometer on how good or bad an era was, it must be evaluated when it is complete. Nobody was saying during the so called Golden era as we were living through it how great it was. It's only in the context of looking back can we truly appreciate how many good/great fighters there were that actually fought each other. The 90's were also another great generation, and they weren't lauded at the time when we were living through them either. It's only now in the prism of looking back do we realize how good/great Holyfield, Lewis, Tyson and Bowe really were. However, as this division now stands there is only one fighter who has a chance to go on and possibly be remembered as a great and achieve greatness, Vitali Klitschko, and that is certainly nowhere close to being a given.

With the conclusion of four Heavyweight title fights in 14 days, Vitali Klitschko is the fighter most writers and fans believe is the top fighter in boxing's flagship division. I guess I pretty much agree with that sentiment too. However, what is that really saying? I wasn't impressed with the quality or skill level of fighting that I saw. Call me negative if you want, but I can only call it the way my eyes saw it. Klitschko showed us he may be the man as of right now, but if he were never to fight again it wouldn't be long before I would probably forget about him. That being said, he is not done adding to his legacy. I'm just speaking in the present tense. I'm not ruling out a long title reign for him, but I'm also not betting on it either.

In his fight versus Corrie Sanders he proved again how tough he is. He also showed the ability to move back and tie Sanders up when he was shook or in trouble. Other than that I wasn't impressed or blown away by him. His jab is a pawing range-finder, he doesn't throw his right hand straight and doesn't get full torque and power behind it. He looked glove-shy and easily discouraged at times. To make matters worse, his eye opened up again after the fourth round,

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despite not getting hit on it very much. And lastly, Klitschko is not quite the puncher I thought he was. Did Sanders all of the sudden become Chuvalo/Cobb like tough, or maybe Vitali isn't the one punch banger some pass him off as being. Maybe even Lennox Lewis was showered with a little too much adulation for his toughness in regards to the shots he took from Klitschko. I seriously believe that had it been Tua, Tyson, or Lewis smashing so many power shots on Sanders' chin, he would've been on the floor.

Sanders on the other hand was very disappointing. Other than showing never seen before toughness and durability, he was exactly what I expected. He went for the early kill. After he didn't get it he fought in spurts and wasn't busy. Once he tired he took punches in order to set Vitali up for a sucker shot. To Vitali's credit he didn't fall for it. He totally out-thought and out-fought Sanders. I also think Sanders was in deplorable condition and was there trying to catch lightning twice in the same bottle. I questioned his desire before the bout and saw nothing from him in the fight to change my outlook. Many writers and fans were all over this scenario before the fight. It definitely wasn't a hard fight to handicap.

What lies ahead? The fight most probably want to see is Klitschko-Golota. Don't look for Don King to let that happen. Not with Golota's heart and toughness still an issue. Remember, it was easy for Golota to remain brave and focused versus Chris Byrd due to his lack of size and knockout power. I would love to see how Golota would hold up under Vitali's mental and physical pressure. Although I doubt Don King will risk his top drawing Heavyweight versus a fighter who he can't sign an option agreement with. If Vitali beat Golota, which I would definitely pick him to do, Golota would be done as a major draw. King can make plenty of fights for Golota with fighters that he controls, like Holyfield, Byrd, and Ruiz. If Golota beat them, than maybe King would let that fight happen if it became a huge PPV attraction, providing Vitali is still the WBC Champ. And even at that it's not a guarantee King would go for it. Most likely he will play the waiting game in the hopes that Klitschko gets knocked off.

Who else is out there? I love and appreciate Chris Byrd's style and toughness. However, I don't think he is big or strong enough to beat Vitali in a rematch. Although I'd love to see it. John Ruiz holds the WBA title. Again, not to pick on John Ruiz, but no way could I see him beating Klitschko. He just isn't skilled enough. He would need much more than just his gameness and toughness. Lamon Brewster? No, I don't think he has a shot either. Guinn, Mesi, or Gomez? How really outstanding are they in all honesty? The only other name that keeps being mentioned as a Klitschko opponent is James Toney. I'm in the minority, but I need to see Toney beat another Heavyweight beside an empty package wrapped up as Evander Holyfield. On top of that, Toney is recovering from a ruptured Achilles tendon. Toney would definitely need his legs versus Vitali, and there is no way of knowing if they'll recover completely. The odds are against them recovering to where they were the last time we saw him in the ring.

Couple Vitali's size and toughness with his adequate skill, and he is probably too much for any other Heavyweight who makes up the current Landscape. Vitali will most likely be the boss in this division for a little while. That is based on the fact that the division is so-so at best, more than it is a statement on how great he is. The division is just really bad. This is not a negative statement from someone who wants to reminisce about a different time and era. I can only go by what my eyes see. I see a weak division, one of the weakest ever. I also see Vitali Klitschko

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as being the only fighter who can possibly stabilize it, despite not believing that he is the next Holmes, Holyfield, or Lewis.