

Vitali Klitschko fights Williams: Does Anyone Care?

Written by Jim Brady

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On December 11 Vitali Klitschko defends the heavyweight championship of the world against Danny Williams, but does anyone care? They might if Klitschko had been marketed properly.

“Marketing” is a much abused term, but in a world with Internet bloggers, 24-hour news channels and all sports networks, image is very important - especially if you’re in the public eye. Klitschko is the heavyweight champion of the world. For lack of a better term, he’s simply “The Baaadest Man on the Planet,” yet he’s been so poorly exposed that nobody really knows who he is, and the public doesn’t care if he wins or loses.

How is this possible? Klitschko won his first 27 fights by knockout, picking up the nickname “Dr. Iron Fist” in the process. He quit against Chris Byrd, after suffering a torn rotator cuff, but he certainly redeemed himself when he gamely out-slugged Lennox Lewis, before he was stopped because of a horrible cut. Lewis retained the heavyweight championship, but wisely retired from the ring without giving Klitschko a rematch.

In a racket full of pretenders, Klitschko has proven he is the best heavyweight in the world, not so much by stopping Corey Sanders last April for the WBC crown, but by the way he sledgehammered Kirk Johnson, Larry Donald and Vaughn Bean into submission before that title bout. This soft spoken 33 year-old giant has wrecking balls for hands - and a PhD. In the history of boxing, in the annals of sport, who better exemplifies "Brains and Brawn" than Klitschko?

He’s a publicity man’s dream, yet he’s anonymous to the general public.

It’s hard to believe. Klitschko’ a good-looking guy who photographs well. He’s the first bonafide white heavyweight champ since Ingemar Johansson won the crown from Floyd Patterson 1960. Yet Vitali’s invisible in the media and can’t get any endorsement deals. Why?

Laila Ali can hustle cars. George Foreman can pitch grills. Oscar De La Hoya had a slew of endorsements on Hispanic TV. Don King’s mug is everywhere.

Why are endorsements important? Because the media is like an echo chamber. Exposure reverberates. A freak like Dennis Rodman showed up in a wedding gown and it greatly added to his NBA marketability, but a class act like Klitschko, who is the heavyweight champion of the world, doesn’t get any exposure, even though he holds the most primal title in sport.

Who’s the imbecile handling this guy? Reports were that the William Morris Agency, the show business people, were doing Klitschko’s business. If that’s true, the “suit” making Klitschko’s deals ain’t got the smarts to find his way to the men’s room.

In a celebrity obsessed culture, why can’t they sell someone who has physical prowess and brains, when basketball players like Shaquille O’Neal and Kobe Bryant get \$100 million endorsement deals? Sure, Bryant lost all his accounts when he was accused of rape, but

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basketball legend Michael Jordan made more money doing endorsements than he ever did playing for the Chicago Bulls.

Yet Klitschko, who should be the antidote to Mike Tyson, or Sonny Liston, or any semi literate thug that can barely mumble a comprehensible sentence, has simply been ignored by Madison Avenue. It's incredible!

Vitali Klitschko should be the face of boxing. He could have carried this red light district of a sport and made sure it reared its head out of the muck and mire. Klitschko should have been on the cover of People magazine. E, the "Entertainment Network," deifies celebrities. Have you ever seen Klitschko there? What about Sports Illustrated?

We live in a world where people are constantly clamoring for role models; where college athletes are functional illiterates; where kids getting high school diplomas can't even read. Klitschko, a poor kid from the Ukraine, is downright inspirational. How many heavyweight champions have a PhD? But for some reason, Vitali Klitschko is an invisible man . . . while the public overdoses on "celebrities" like Paris Hilton.