

## Heavy Issues for Cruiser Vassiliy Jirov

Written by Joey Knish

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Tough decisions lie ahead as former cruiserweight champion Vassiliy "The Tiger" Jirov saw his record as a heavyweight drop to 0-2 as he was knocked out by Michael Moorer last week. The bout, televised on "The Best Damn Sports Show Period" was a battle of attrition as both men had their moments, but Jirov once again found the heavyweight power too much to handle when taken into deep waters.

The problems for Jirov are that he is not a big guy in a heavyweight division full of super-sized fighters with heavy hands. He earned a reputation for being a tenacious body puncher and was an in-your-face fighter who kept the pressure on his opponents and wore them down. Cruiserweights couldn't cope with his attacking style and high volume work rate.

However, since his move up to the heavyweight division, Jirov has found that his punches do not have the same impact on his larger opponents and that his opponents can crack pretty well themselves. So for a guy who has always fought coming at his opponents and is there for the hitting, tough decisions lie ahead.

Consecutive defeats to two smaller heavyweights suggest that Jirov is in over his head.

In the fight against Michael Moorer, Jirov was ahead on the cards until being stopped by Moorer. What got Jirov ahead was his solid bodywork and combinations while Moorer was more economical with his punches. In the third round a combination left hook to the body coupled with a clash of heads put Moorer down to a knee for a count. Officially it was scored a knockdown, as the shot to the ribs was significant.

Moorer recovered well, started to pick up his own volume, and by the eighth round the fight was evening up. The end came in the ninth as Jirov came in as he usually does and Moorer peppered him with several solid blows punctuated by a flush one-two combination that sent the Kazakhstan native careening to the canvas. Jirov got up too soon on uneasy legs and would have been best served to take a knee and rise at the count of eight. Instead, Jirov was up right away, fell back into the ropes and came forward off them looking like his legs were ready buckle with one false step. Correctly, the bout was stopped, and so might be Jirov's heavyweight career.

"The Tiger" made a decent - albeit losing - debut as a heavyweight by coming on strong late in the bout and dropping undefeated Joe Mesi three times. Unfortunately he had been out-boxed for much of the fight and had neither the power nor the time to finish Mesi. At 6'1" and 227-pounds, Joe Mesi is not a big heavyweight by today's standards and Jirov couldn't win that fight. Against Moorer he faced an opponent who stood just 6'2" and packed in 247-pounds into his robust frame. Not exactly the biggest and baddest of the bad, but still too big and too much for Jirov.

As a cruiserweight Jirov only suffered one defeat and that was in a very exciting fight to

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now-heavyweight James Toney. While heavyweight money is better than that paid at cruiserweight, it is clear that Jirov will never be a top heavyweight. Until losing to James Toney most people considered Vassiliy Jirov to be the best sub-200 pound fighter in the world. Of course Wayne Braithwaite, Jean Marc Mormeck and O'Neil Bell would certainly take exception to that claim. So what now?

The choice seems clear for Jirov. There is plenty of competition at cruiserweight and there are big money fights ready to be made. At heavyweight there is no future beyond being out-gunned by bigger stronger fighters as we have already seen.

In boxing the obvious choice isn't always easy to make and Vassiliy Jirov has some heavy decisions ahead.