

Vitali Klitschko: Next Big Thing or Mild Upset?

Written by Charles Jay
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Are the Klitschkos overrated? Of course they are. When there were people referring to them as possible "saviors of the heavyweight division", and using terms like "global domination", even in jest, how could they possibly fulfill everyone's expectations?

Both fighters have quit inexplicably in a fight before; how could one build a lasting legacy when he is pre-disposed to that in the midst of adversity?

While Wladimir isn't Primo Carnera and Vitali isn't Jess Willard, they're not Jack Dempsey and Rocky Marciano either.

Boxing fans like to get overly excited, especially about big white guys who can punch. But as we're on the prowl for the "next big thing" which hopefully will be the next REAL thing, let's curb the enthusiasm just a little.

The heavyweight history books generally don't revere people with glass chins. We can say with at least a little confidence that Wladimir isn't the most rugged heavyweight who ever lived. You can have a lot of physical attributes, but if there's one weakness that can be the death knell for a heavyweight, it's a substandard set of whiskers.

So Wlad didn't pass the "legends" test.

How will his brother fare?

Well, here comes Vitali, with the storyline that he is sticking up for the family name. We aren't so quick to call him the guy who can't take a punch. And we must ask that the jury remain in the deliberation room, because he's obviously been on the 'giving' end a lot more than he's been the "recipient".

Even so, his most impressive performance has come in defeat, as he was cut and stopped by a somewhat out-of-shape and disinterested Lennox Lewis.

If Vitali looks as good as he did in that fight, or as he did against Kirk Johnson subsequent to that, is it going to be enough to topple Corrie Sanders? Or will the southpaw South African singlehandedly turn back the "global invasion"?

Let's look at it from the betting angle. At least one Las Vegas sportsbook has taken the fight off the board, indicating that someone believes the story that there was something untoward about Wladimir's loss to Lamon Brewster two weeks ago and that it will spill over to this fight. Introduce those people to Mark Lane, if you will (if you don't know who that is, do a Google search).

If we can leave conspiracy theories aside for a moment, let me give you three reasons I might

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be tempted to bet on Sanders - he's a left-hander, he can whack, especially early, and he's fetching a price that looks pretty attractive at the moment.

At 5Dimes he's bringing +350 (7/2). And Olympic Sports has him at +325.

In other words, he could very well be the guy who supplies the "value" in this proposition.

However, if our objective is picking the winner, and we can be happy with a 25% one-night return on our money (hey, that's better than shylocking), I would lean toward Vitali, who is -400 (lay 4/1) at World Sports Exchange. On an overall basis, he's probably proven to be a better fighter than his brother, though I don't think he has as much natural talent.

You've heard of the "Accidental Tourist"? Well, in a sense, Sanders is the "accidental fighter". He came in as a substitute against Wladimir last March and knocked him down four times en route to a second-round stoppage.

Girls may just want to have fun, but many guys just want to play golf. Put Sanders into this category.

The fight with Wladimir Klitschko, combined with a two-round KO of Otis Tisdale and a first-round knockout of Michael Sprott, constitute the only five rounds Sanders has fought since June of 2000. That's nearly four years. You obviously don't stay too sharp like that, unless you spend all that free time fine-tuning your short game.

Sanders wants a payday so he can go out with some security and do what he REALLY wants to do, which is play on one of the pro golf tours. This is obviously not a formula for global domination, unless he's on the right side of a four-ball match with his friend Ernie Els.

With his habit of inactivity, Sanders had better get to Vitali very early. I've noticed that only one of his knockout wins has come after the fourth round.

And we must also consider the difference between the perception of what Wladimir Klitschko was before he faced Sanders and the reality of what we now know about him.

Yes, girls just want to have fun. And maybe, just maybe, guys just want to play golf.

As far as I'm concerned, I just want to get paid.

Vitali in six.