

Lewis-Klitschko: One Year Later

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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What a difference a year makes. It's been exactly one year since former Heavyweight Champ Lennox Lewis and current WBC Champ Vitali Klitschko treated Boxing fans to a very exciting and entertaining fight. At the time I wrote that, it wasn't what I would consider a great fight, but it was a thrilling and entertaining fight to say the least.

The problem I had with the fight was the caliber of skill that was exhibited. Neither Lewis or Klitschko fought like the two best Heavyweight fist fighters on the Planet. Actually, the quality of fighting looked more like a Tough-man final, or maybe Alonzo Mourning versus Larry Johnson on a good day.

On June 21st 2003, many thought, including myself, that Lewis and Klitschko were the two best and most formidable Heavyweights in the World. Well it's a year later, and, in my opinion, nothing has happened in the Heavyweight division to change that belief. We know what Lewis was capable of at his best. And Klitschko, while he's not the most polished Heavyweight I've seen, his size and toughness probably make him too much for any of the other World's top ranked Heavyweights to deal with.

The Lewis-Klitschko fight was stopped by the ring Doctor between the sixth and seventh rounds due to a severe cut over Vitali Klitschko's left eye. At the time the fight was halted, Klitschko led on all three official scorecards 58-56 or 4-2 in rounds. Hardly enough for either fighter to claim certain victory over the other.

The fight was action packed with both fighters throwing bombs at each other and looking to end it with one punch. When the sixth round ended, Lewis went back to his corner and plopped down on his stool. Lennox was clearly tired as he sat on his stool huffing and puffing. In the other corner, Klitschko was bleeding all over the place, and wasn't in that great of shape either. However, Klitschko didn't appear as spent as Lewis.

During the course of this fight, both fighters landed their Sunday best on the other. For a brief second Lewis was shook once. Klitschko, on the other hand, absorbed some of Lewis' best, and never appeared to be quite as shook as Lewis. Due to the nasty gash over Vitali's eye, the fight couldn't continue. In the immediate aftermath following the fight, fans and media were split on who would've come out on top had the fight continued. The Klitschko faction felt that Lewis wasn't properly prepared for the fight and was running out of gas. The assumption being that Vitali was in better shape and would've held up better in the second half of the fight.

The Lewis faction insisted that Lennox was coming on and really starting to tag Vitali with some of the best punches he had landed on him in the sixth round. On top of that, it was just a matter of time before the cut over his eye totally impeded him and the fight would've been stopped. Something that is hard to deny.

I think anyone who says with certainty that either fighter was definitely on his way to victory is a

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fool, and hasn't been a very keen observer of the fight game. There have been a plethora of fights throughout Boxing history, especially Heavyweight history where the totally unforeseen happened. All we know for sure is that Lewis was probably in the worst shape of his career, and Klitschko put up one helluva fight and proved he belonged in the ring with him.

In the year that has passed, Lewis retired with the title and respect. No doubt the Lewis legacy will grow in the coming years. The fact that he ranks fourth in Heavyweight title fights won, behind only Joe Louis, Muhammad Ali, and Larry Holmes will always keep him in the conversation when discussing all time greats.

Since losing to Lewis last year, Klitschko TKO'd Kirk Johnson in a title elimination bout, and stopped Corrie Sanders to win the WBC title, left vacant with the retirement of Lewis. In the three bouts Klitschko has had in the last year, not one of his opponents have bettered him in the ring, including Lewis. At this time Vitali is perceived as being the best Heavyweight in the World. Not to the degree Lewis was this time last year, but he would be a solid favorite over any other Heavyweight in the World. That is unless Lewis decided to come out of retirement, which wouldn't surprise me a bit.

Despite the disappointing ending of the Lewis-Klitschko bout last year, there is a silver lining -- Lewis fought the best available opponent in the World before he retired, and he won. Remember, it was a punch thrown by Lewis that opened the cut over Klitschko's eye. The last time I checked, cuts caused by punches are part of Boxing.

The silver lining for Klitschko is that although he didn't win, he didn't lose in the ring either. For those six rounds that Klitschko fought Lewis, he gave every bit as much as he took. He also showed that his chin is solid, and his heart is all there. During the last year, Vitali has shown that he may be just the right man to succeed Lewis as the perceived best Heavyweight in the world. Only time will tell.