

Old Faces, New Year For Boxing

Written by Joey Knish

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As the calendar turns the page on another year there are ring rumblings that a few bright lights from the past may have their hopes set on shining once again. Most intriguing of the potential comeback kids are world ruler Lennox Lewis, heavyweight challenger David Tua and 'Ferocious' Fernando Vargas.

Lewis has been battling boredom since hanging up his boxing gloves and putting on his promoter's hat in June of 2003. Vitali Klitschko now reigns atop the division, reminding everyone and anyone that will listen how he was ahead on points against Lewis in the Briton's final fight and how 'the end was near' for LL. Regardless of how close or far from the truth that is, the record books still show a TKO 6 victory for Lewis and that result won't change regardless of how much Vitali talks about it.

I just checked again and Lewis still won. No change.

The ego of a fighter is often as big as they come because a mountain of confidence is practically a basic requirement in order to step between the ropes and take part in the fistic fury. Believing you can win is only the first step to actually getting the job done, and Vitali talking as if he won the fight is part of the psychological chess game being played to light the competitive fire in Lewis. Based on recent comments from Lennox it may just be working.

Lewis obviously believes he can beat Vitali Klitschko, and based on the fact that he already did, his belief is well-founded. So, if Lewis felt he had a pugilistic responsibility to knock Vitali from the perch he called his own, it would be to a surprise to no one if he slipped the mitts back on and did just that. Of course, retirement can corrode the skills of the best former champions and despite that reality a tune-up bout likely wouldn't be in Lewis' plans.

David Tua was once considered one of the best prospects to make his way through the heavyweight ranks in recent years. Standing less than 5' 10", excluding his high-rise hairdo, Tua was power packed and made a habit of separating opponents from their senses at the drop of a hat. Or in this case, with a lethal left hook.

John Ruiz, Hasim Rahman, Oleg Maskaev, Michael Moorer, Danell Nicholson and Fres Oquendo all tasted the power that 'Tuaman' possesses, and none liked the taste much. His professional record sits at 42-3-1, with 37 victories inside the distance, and the three losses were all to the top fighters in the division.

Ike Ibeabuchi won a twelve round decision over Tua for his first loss. Many believe that Ibeabuchi would be the best heavyweight in the world today if not for one minor detail - he can't get out of jail. The second loss came at the hands of Lennox Lewis who was simply too good, too tall and all wrong for Tua. Neither the difference in height nor pure skill could be made up by Tua's hook, as he never came close. Chris Byrd was the last to defeat Tua, as Byrd did what Byrd does - he boxed beautifully for twelve rounds to take their IBF title eliminator.

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With only three losses and each of those defeats to top fighters, Tua, on paper at least, could jump back into the mix if he does in fact come back. Managerial disputes and a general malaise have kept David Tua on the shelf since an uneventful draw in his rematch with Hasim Rahman in March, 2003. Rahman has fought six times since that bout and is on the verge of another major title opportunity. Tua has not and therefore is not.

Tua's 19-second victory over current WBA champion John Ruiz is something many fans would love to see again. It is also a memory that must keep the Samoan's fire burning, considering where Ruiz stands in the division with a belt around his waist.

Stepping down to the Light Middleweight division, Fernando Vargas has been missing in action for a year. 2004 passed without a Vargas fight, which means we all missed a few good scraps. Whether you like Vargas or not, the fact is that he makes for exciting bouts, win or lose.

When 'El Feroz' fights there is a darn good chance that someone is getting his butt dropped to the floor - and if it is Vargas who goes down, you can bet your bottom dollar he is getting back up. Vargas knocked out 22 of 26 opponents and was knocked out twice, in his only career losses. Winky Wright and Ike Quartey are the only two fighters who have lost to Vargas and still managed to hear the final bell. His battle with Felix Trinidad was classic Vargas as the Oxnard, California native got up from knockdowns five times and managed to return the favor to put Tito down as well. He lost that bout, as he did against Oscar De La Hoya, but he earned a lot of respect even in losing.

Every New Year there are unfamiliar faces that jump to the forefront and peak our interest, keeping us passionate about the sport of boxing. While 2005 will be no different in that respect, it may also be some familiar fighters that light the fire anew.