

Special to TheSweetScience.com, from the Pat Putnam Classic Series, this article originally appeared in Sports Illustrated.

This is one of my favorites, if only that it was the night that finally convinced me that if there was any more combat in my future, I sure as hell would not want Lennox Lewis on one of my flanks. For his inauguration, President George W Bush is having nine balls; if Lewis had been elected president, he still would have none. Also, it was a few nights before the fight that my buddy, Fast Eddie Schuyler, elected to order a martini in a Welsh restaurant. "Are you nuts," asked Ken Jones of the Independent (London). Jones is as patriotic as any Welshman, but he knows where to draw the line. "Nobody in Wales knows how to make a martini." Undaunted, Schuyler, a beer and Jack Daniels drinker, told the waitress he wanted his straight up, no ice, two olives. After a long wait, she returned with God only knows what in a tall water glass. Schuyler took a tentative sip of the evil-looking concoction and then spit it on the floor. "God, I've been poisoned," he shouted.

Cardiff, Wales, October 1993 - Settled in among the other 20,000 fans in the Cardiff (Wales) Arms Park arena last Saturday morning was Tommy Virgets, the trainer of Tommy Morrison, the muscular American heavyweight who will get the next shot at Britain's Lennox Lewis. Virgets was there in the cold damp night air to see Lewis defend his WBC heavyweight championship against Frank Bruno, another in a lengthy chain of lumbering British giants with Wedgwood china chins. When the last cannon had been fired, and after referee Mickey Vann had taken Bruno into protective custody to prevent more serious damage in the seventh round, Virgets found it hard to believe that Lewis, while remaining undefeated, could be so limited in skills.

"I came over here wondering if Tommy was ready for Lewis," said Virgets. "Now I wonder if Lewis is ready for Morrison. If this doesn't motivate Tommy to keep away from the booze and women for the next six months, nothing will."

Ten hours after the fight it was announced that Morrison and Lewis would meet March 5 at the new MGM Grand in Las Vegas, which could put a serious dent in the plan to have the British boxer go against Riddick Bowe, the heavyweight champion, in a unification fight late next year. "Lewis is made for Tommy," said Virgets. "Tommy loves a war and Lewis obviously doesn't. He retreats under the slightest pressure. If anything, he has gone backward, back to fighting like an amateur."

Before Lewis, Morrison has another fight scheduled, against young Michael Bent Oct. 29 in Tulsa, a match up that should put a dent in nothing but Bent's undefeated record. Bent is a skilled boxer, but is short of power and has a delicate chin. While no doubt now wondering if he has delayed too long to put Lewis on his dance card, Bowe will defend his title against ex champion Evander Holyfield in their rematch Nov. 14 at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. He has another defense scheduled against Michael Moorer in April.

Lennox Lewis-Frank Bruno: What If In Cardiff

Written by Pat Putnam

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"People want to see Bowe fight Lewis," Seth Abraham, HBO's chief executive for sports programming, said late Saturday morning, "but if they fool around and delay it much longer, nobody will care. The public has begun to lose interest already." No matter what happens, Abraham hopes to force the winner of Morrison Lewis to fight the winner of Bowe Moorer to unify the title next October or November. "Enough is enough," he said. "I don't want any more interim fights."

Seven rounds of two British heavyweights fighting for anything on a cold and damp Welsh early morning is more than enough. Not in this century, or any other, have two Brits fought for a heavyweight title, and now we know why. Somewhere Tommy Farr, the great Welsh heavyweight who gave Joe Louis all he could handle for 15 hard rounds, is trying not to weep.

"I have nothing against Bruno," on Friday said Wale's Lord Brooks, the senior steward of the British Boxing Board of Control, "but for the credibility of British boxing, I have to hope that Lewis hits him on the chin in the first round."

A magnificently built man without a suggestion of malice outside of the ring, which has made him greatly adored by the British public, Bruno's record of 36 victories in 39 fights was vastly misleading. Most of the men he hammered to the floor could not have survived two minutes in a Philadelphia gym. When he moved up in class against Americans, Bruno's carefully woven reputation came unraveled.

Bonecrusher Smith, then a fighter of no reputation with a bleak future, lost most of nine rounds to Bruno. Bonecrusher knocked out the big slow muscular Brit in the tenth. It took Tim Witherspoon 11 rounds to find that porcelain chin when the pair fought for World Boxing Association title. Mike Tyson needed only five rounds to end Bruno's challenge for the undisputed crown. Alas, one good shot on that fragile jaw leaves Bruno with the survival capability of an ant in the middle of a Mummer's parade.

At a luncheon in Cardiff the day before the fight, the British Boxing Board of Control auctioned off a pair of boxing gloves signed by Lewis and Bruno for the benefit of young Welsh athletes. (Because Bruno had been asked to sign the gloves first, Lewis at first refused, but later relented.) The enterprising Welsh auctioneer, a desperate when the bidding stalled at \$2,400, offered to erase Bruno's name.

"Stop that," said Lord Brooks, trying not to laugh.

Bruno's reputation as a fighter took another dip when he retired briefly four years ago to concentrate on a stage career in pantomime. In the tradition of pantomime, men play the women's roles; the women play the male parts. One of the 6'3" 238 pounder's more vivid roles was Juliet, which makes you understand why Romeo, after seeing Bruno in a pink dress, killed himself.

Lewis, a 4-1 favorite, was under pressure to end it quickly and violently. His credentials as a champion were shaky at best in Britain, non-existent in the rest of the world. Born in England of Jamaican parents, in 1988 he had won an Olympic title while fighting as an amateur in Canada.

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Ignored by the major American boxing players, he had returned to England to fight as a professional; many Brits still look upon him as a Jamaican by blood, Canadian at heart, and only British for financial considerations.

"Bruno worked very hard at being popular," said Lewis, who denied a charge by Bruno that he had called his rival for British affections an Uncle Tom. "He did a lot of things I wouldn't do. I certainly wouldn't wear a dress."

Lewis had taken the title as a gift, after Bowe had tossed it aside, and while he won his first defense, a boring 12 round affair with Tony Tucker last August, he had displayed few championship qualities. Against Bruno, until he found that tortured chin with a left hook early in the seventh round,, he displayed even less.

"He pushes his jab," said Viruets. "He doesn't throw combinations. He doesn't attack. When he did get aggressive, Bruno came right back at him and he immediately backed off. He just doesn't want to get hit."

Bruno came in wearing large plastic bags over his shoes, with The Real Brit stitched across the rear of his boxing trunks, and to the tune of Land of Hope and Glory, an English patriotic song that excludes the Scots, Irish and Welsh. Lewis was more considerate of his surroundings; he entered to reggae music under both the British Union Jack and the Welsh Red Dragon flags.

The decidedly anti-English crowd was unmoved by the challenger's gaffe and the champion's gesture. The cry went up for the challenger: Bruno, Bruno, Bruno deep and drawn out. Only the Welsh national anthem Land Of My Fathers was sung. Lord Brooks wisely had ordered that the British anthem not be played. "The crowd will only boo," he said. "It would not be fitting."

With everyone casting an anxious eye at the sky, the start of the fight was delayed when the ring physician failed to arrive, among his duties was to bring coagulants for each corner's cutman. A suggestion from the press row that they use model airplane glue went unheeded. After the physician arrived, there was a further delay when he had trouble prying the tops off the tiny bottles.

Finally, under a black but arid sky, the fight began. In the early rounds, Bruno built a comfortable lead with a hard and accurate jab, which if the rain had fallen as feared, could have turned the outdoor fight into an even greater farce. It had showered hard and often, always with swirling winds, in the small Welsh capital most of the week, and the prediction for more of the same during the outdoor fight was 40 per cent.

If it was raining at the scheduled 1 a.m. start, the promoters had provided for a 24 hour postponement. The ungodly late start was so that HBO could telecast the fight live back to the United States, where the time in the Eastern portion of the country is five hours earlier.

The joker in the rules would appear only if the rain began falling **after** the fight had started. Left to the referee's judgment, if the fight was halted before three rounds had been completed, it would be ruled a technical draw. If Mickey Vann halted the fight after three rounds, the man

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leading on the scorecards would have been judged the winner.

If it had rained after the third round Saturday morning, Frank Bruno, the mute Juliet, would have been the WBC heavyweight champion of the world. After three rounds, he led on all three cards 29 28. In the eyes of many, although the judges disagreed, which seems to be the fashion in WBC judging circles these days, he was still well ahead after six.

While Bruno's crushing jab turned the left side of his face swollen and bloody, Lewis operated in retreat behind a pushing jab and an occasionally thrown overhand right, most of which followed a Western Union message announcing their departure. The few attacks Lewis made seemed spurred by anger, like a man goaded by a bully until he can take no more. When Bruno responded to the assaults with a barrage of his own, Lewis quickly backed off.

And what were the WBC judges watching? After six rounds, Adrain Morgan, a Welshman, had Bruno ahead 59 55, the same as Sports Illustrated. The two Americans, Jerry Roth and Tony Castellano, had it 57 57, which would have made it a majority draw, another WBC bad habit of late.

No matter. At that point, Bruno's chin got in the way of a Lewis left hook and the sound of glass breaking echoed throughout the lovely 99 year old rugby stadium. "I saw him pulling back to throw a right hand," said Lewis, "and I hit him with a perfect hook, which everybody said I didn't have."

The result was stunning. Once hit, Bruno—the almost world champion—stands stark still, as if suddenly beset by paralysis. Most fighters, at least the good ones, when hurt will grab their opponent in a bear hug, or quickly retreat, or fire back until their heads clear. Tommy Hearns once when stung hard by James Kinchen, snared both Kinchen and referee Mills Lane in a bear hug and refused to let go until his head cleared.

With his opponent suddenly little more than a heavy bag, Lewis turned vicious. Right hand after right hand slammed against the unmoving head. As Bruno began to sag under the savage barrage, Vann moved in, pushed Lewis away—and warned the champion for hitting with an open glove. "I knew I was giving Bruno a few extra moments to recover," said Vann later, "but a foul is a foul."

When Lewis was released from the penalty box, Bruno just stood there waiting, defenseless, his hands down, a motionless mime playing Marie Antoinette wondering why it never rains when you need it. After a few more needless punches, Vann stepped in again, this time to negotiate a lasting peace.

An hour later Bruno was on his way back to London, where it had rained all night.