

Heavy Confusion Above 200

Written by Joey Knish

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History suggests that the popularity of the sport of boxing often depends most on its heaviest fighters, and assuming that still holds true, the sport is in a state of mass confusion at this moment.

While it is true that marquee fights and star fighters at the lower weight classes still draw the attention of more than just boxing fanatics, the fact that the general public likes to watch big men hit each other real hard is beyond debate. As of this moment, however, not even a hardcore boxing fan could make a convincing argument as to who is the best 200+ pound fighter in the world and why.

The consensus choice, if there had been one, as to the best active heavyweight in the world today would have been Vitali Klitschko. However, the WBC champ Klitschko (35-2-0, 34 KOs) has been on the shelf since December of last year when he TKO'd Danny Williams in eight rounds. An on-and-off match with Hasim Rahman is off again until Klitschko finds himself in physical condition to do battle once again. Rahman 40-5-1 (33 wins coming via the short route) is a legitimate threat to the towering Klitschko, as the Baltimore native utilizes one of the best jabs in the division followed by a jackhammer right hand. While sitting and waiting, and waiting, for Klitschko to be in "game shape," Rahman was forced to take an August bout with the suddenly dangerous Monte Barrett (31-3-0, 17 KOs) in August for the WBC interim title.

Since the bout between Rahman and Barrett was made, Vitali has started to make noise again about suddenly being fit to fight again and, to his chagrin, his dance partner Rahman took Barrett to the ball. Under the circumstances, Klitschko has made it known that he would like to come back against WBO representative Lamon Brewster, 32-2-0 (28 KOs). Brewster probably could be ready to fight soon after his most recent bout with Andrew Golota, which was over before most butts hit their seats.

One has to assume, though, that if Vitali Klitschko can't fight Rahman for the WBC title – because Rahman is fighting Barrett for the interim title – then the potential Klitschko-Brewster fight would be solely for Brewster's WBO belt. That bout would certainly be the most appealing to Lamon Brewster as it would represent the best payday for him in today's market. But wait a minute. The WBO recently held an eliminator bout between Luan Krasniqi, 28-1-1 (14 KOs), and Lance Whitaker to determine the next challenger to their heavyweight champion. As the WBO champion, Brewster is now obligated to fight Krasniqi, the winner of that bout. German promoter Klaus-Peter Kohl handles Krasniqi and would likely make a strong bid to have a potential tilt between Krasniqi and Brewster over on his home turf in Germany.

Over in the WBA, their champion actually lost his last bout and retired, only to be named champion again and be handed his belt back. After losing his title in April to James Toney in a competitive bout, WBA champion John Ruiz announced that he was done and would not be there to be kicked around anymore. The defeat sent the "Quite Man" out of boxing with a 41-6-1 record with 28 whacks, but then James Toney didn't pass the pee test and returned Ruiz to us

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with one less loss. The bout was changed to a “No Contest” on both boxers’ records - as if the entire event could be erased from the history books.

A case could be made that IBF heavyweight champion Chris Byrd is the best heavyweight today, although most people don’t appreciate his diet version of heavyweight hitting. Byrd, 38-2-1 (20 KOs), has run off an 8-0 string since losing to Wladimir Klitschko over in Germany in 2000. He has made a habit of using his smaller 6’ 2”, 215-pound frame to survive the first half of heavyweight fights and then come on to outlast his larger opponents as they fade down the stretch. Next up for Byrd is an August defense against Belarusian Serguei Lyakhovich in Chicago. Lyakhovich is only a one-time loser to Maurice “dangerous-when-I-wanna-be” Harris to go along with 22 victories and 14 knockouts. He took advantage of former prospect Dominick Guinn to get the title shot, but that will likely be where his string of fortunate events ends.

Calvin Brock and Samuel Peter also both fit somewhere in the puzzle of legitimate contenders. Brock (25-0, 20 KOs) is fresh of impressive wins over Clifford Etienne (TKO 3) and Jameel McCline (UD 10), while the Nigerian Peter will meet fellow prospect Taurus Sykes, 23-1-1 (6 KOs) in July at the Events Center in Reno. Seven-foot Russian giant Nicolay Valuev (41-0, 31 KOs) and fringe titleholder DaVarrayl Williamson (22-3, 18 KOs) put the finishing touches on the heavyweight picture.

To summarize, James Toney beat John Ruiz, and “The Quietman” subsequently retired, but Ruiz is still the WBA champion. WBC ruler Vitali Klitschko postponed his mandatory defense against Hasim Rahman on several occasions, so Rahman will face Monte Barrett for the WBA interim title. Now that Rahman is booked, Klitschko feels like fighting again, so he wants to take on WBO champ Lamon Brewster, but Brewster is mandated to fight Luan Krasniqi. Chris Byrd is the IBF champ and will likely stay that way. At least someone has their house in order.

And have you heard the rumor that Andrew Golota might be in line for yet another title shot by taking on Nicolay Valuev in an eliminator? I’m so confused.