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Today we are experiencing an unprecedented delay in discovering the predominant heavyweight following the retirement of the consensus champion, in this case Lennox Lewis. In years past in fairly short order a champion emerged that most of the boxing writers and fans agreed upon as the new wearer of the crown. It wasn't always necessarily fair. For example – why exactly was Max Schmeling pitted against Jack Sharkey for Gene Tunney's vacated title? How did the boxing powers decide that Archie Moore and Floyd Patterson were the logical contenders for Rocky Marciano's championship?

Enough of that, however. Today's situation is what it is, four men laying claim to the heavyweight championship. Each so-called champion carries credentials that lend some credence to the claim. Each also carries baggage that argues against it.

While it's hard to make sense of it all, we must try to clarify the list of top fighters in the division and hope (really hope) that the fighters at the top of the list meet each other to settle the non-sense.

The ratings below are offered for your discussion and argument. I know that everyone viewing the list would like to see it settled in the ring – I do too – but until that time you have my best guess. I hope to read your comments – but if you decide to write me please tell me why I'm right or wrong. I'll assemble the responses and develop another article that speaks to the differences in opinion that exist in our little boxing world.

1. Vitali Klitschko, Ukraine – WBC Champion
Scheduled to meet the winner of Rahman-Barrett in September as a mandatory defense of his WBC title. May opt for the big cash and meet red-hot WBO titleholder Brewster. He would surely be stripped of the belt – but the world would see the winner as the new king.

2. Hasim Rahman, USA
Meets Barrett for something called an "interim" WBC title. What that really means is that the WBC collects a sanctioning fee for a fight that does not involve a champion. Unfortunately for Klitschko, however, is that it requires a 65-35 purse split in a mandatory defense instead of a much better (for Klitschko) split that the champion could command.

3. Chris Byrd, USA -- IBF Champion
Next on his list is Serguei Lyakhovich, from Belarus, in a bout that is in no way a gimme. Byrd is 34 and appears to be in decline. Gift decisions versus Golota and Oquendo do nothing to add luster to a career that has been generally commendable. Should he win, he's right in the thick of any unification plan.

4. Lamon Brewster, USA -- WBO Champion
Brewster's recent demolition of Golota serves notice that perhaps he isn't the one-hit wonder that some thought. Beyond that he actually has a personality that, if properly harnessed, is great

for fans. He is technically required to face former European champion Krasniqi, a recent knockout winner over Lance Whitaker. A match with Vitali Klitschko, however, would prove far more lucrative. A win in that fight would cement his claim as a true champion.

5. Wladimir Klitschko, Ukraine
Despite his knockout losses to Brewster and Sanders, there are precious few fighters in the division who can capture even a round fighting him. He destroyed Byrd. McCline was never in their fight. Barrett was on the deck five times. Beating him will be no easy task – non-punchers need not apply. He won't be outboxed.

6. James Toney, USA
A winner and loser vs. John Ruiz. A winner in the ring and a loser in the post-fight urinalysis. Let me state emphatically that steroids did not win that fight. Toney is out for two years according to the WBA – but who cares. He should make a bee-line to V. Klitschko for the big payoff.

7. Monte Barrett, USA
He has resurrected his career since his blowout loss to W. Klitschko. Solid wins over Owen Beck and Guinn, and a disputed loss to former contender Joe Mesi, earned him an eliminator with Rahman. He has the biggest opportunity of his career right in front of him and it is no small feat. He'll have to be at his best to have a chance against the former champ.

8. Calvin Brock, USA
Brock scored his first significant win by outscoring McCline. He also climbed off the canvas and went on to close strong. He's also stopped the able but weak-chinned Cliff Etienne. He must strike against another top fighter soon. He's a young 30, but he doesn't have long to make his move.

9. John Ruiz, USA -- WBA Champion
The man with nine lives. Ruiz loses the title to Roy Jones, wins an interim title after Jones vacates, and is later named champion again. He loses it to Toney and is handed the title back one more time. Unbelievable. He's not a crowd favorite (perhaps the understatement of the year) but he wins far more often than he loses. He's likely to be involved in a unification of some sort. Look for his luck to run out……..maybe.

10. Samuel Peter, Nigeria
The fresh face on the scene. Okay, he's never beaten a top 10 fighter or anyone who has been in the top 10. This is a gut-feeling that he has at least some of the goods. He obviously has some rough edges, but man can this guy hit. And he's exciting to watch. Let's hope he does well.

11. Jameel McCline, USA
12. Audley Harrison, England
13. Danny Williams, England
14. Mike Tyson, USA
15. Corrie Sanders, South Africa
16. Nicolay Valuev, Russia

17. Oleg Maskaev, Uzbekistan
18. DaVarryl Williamson, USA
19. David Tua, New Zealand
20. Fres Oquendo, USA (Puerto Rico)
21. Serguei Lyakhovich, Belarus
22. Dominick Guinn, USA
23. Luan Krasniqi, Germany (via Kosovo)
24. Vassily Jirov, Kazakhstan
25. Kali Meehan, Australia