

What the Heck Do You Know About Owen Beck?

Written by Aaron Tallent
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Owen "What the Heck" Beck was not focused for last February's world title eliminator in which Monte "Two Gunz" Barrett put him on the canvas four times. According to Beck, it was apparent the moment he made his way to the ring that he was caught up in the hubbub of his first big-time fight.

"I love *Sanford and Son* and I went out to the theme song," said Beck. "Normally, I've never done that before. I always went out to gospel music that I know. And that's where I believe I let myself down by just throwing the fight away. By going to the ring knowing that God is present, I went out there playing something else. I got careless and I got caught."

Beck, along with IBF heavyweight champion Chris Byrd and WBO heavyweight titleholder Lamon Brewster, is one of the few fighters in the game whose entrance music is Christian-based.

Faith has always been an important part of Beck's life, ever since he was a boy growing up in Jamaica. "I was brought up in a Christian home and I have remained that way," he said. His fascination with boxing has been with him for most of his life as well. "I really wanted to [box] when I was about six years old but my grandmother wouldn't let me at that time," said Beck.

His nickname, which is one of the wittiest in boxing, is not from his childhood, but it might as well have been. Like most boyhood nicknames, it was given to him by his family and friends ... against "What the Heck's" wishes.

"We were sitting around the table trying to figure out something and my brother came with the name 'What the Heck,'" said Beck. "Four of us were okay with it. Three of us weren't. I was one of the ones who did not like the name. It was a 4-3 vote."

Still, "What the Heck" admits the moniker is catchy.

Growing up, Beck idolized Muhammad Ali and prominent Jamaican fighters like Marshall Simpson and Lincoln Carter. His grandmother finally let him go to the gym when he was ten years old and he made the most of the opportunity.

As an amateur, Beck fought 77 fights, and won 72 of them. He turned professional in December 1998, scoring his first victory with a stoppage of Max Key in Atlanta. He moved to the United States, settling in Nashville, Tennessee in 2000.

From 1999 to 2004, Beck remained perfect, defeating many bottom-tier fighters and journeymen. He received his first opportunity to face premiere competition with the Barrett fight in St. Louis on the undercard of the Cory Spinks/Zab Judah fight.

The fight was a brutal slugfest. In the second round, Barrett dropped Beck with a right uppercut

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followed by a left hook. In the fourth, "What the Heck's" right cross opened up a nasty cut over Barrett's eye. Despite the free flow of blood, Barrett continued banging away. The fight was fairly even when he dropped Beck with another right uppercut a minute into the ninth round. "Two Gunz" sent him to the canvas two more times before referee Jay Nady stopped the fight at 2:52.

"He (Barrett) came prepared," said Beck about his first and only loss. "He knew when I stepped into the ring, I bring everything. If you're going to win, you're either going to knock me out or kill me. With the Barrett fight, I just got ahead of myself. Just got caught up in the crowd, got caught up in what I was doing. Not really focused 100% like I should have."

Now, Beck once again has his eye on the prize. His goal is the undisputed heavyweight title and he will continue that quest when he returns to the ring Saturday night to face Ray Austin in Cleveland. Austin is a last-minute replacement for Sergei Liakhovich. The Belarussian heavyweight was forced to bow out after he sustained a bruised cartilage injury to his rib cage.

"I don't know much about Ray Austin," said Beck. "I just know he is a big guy and I've seen that before."

If the fight goes his way, Beck, who is under contract with Don King Productions, will face whomever King pits him against next. While many fighters have many negative comments towards King, Beck has nothing but praise.

"I love the man (Don King)," he said. "He's opened up numerous doors for a lot of young fighters like myself."

Beck also hopes to one day get an opportunity to fight a major bout in Nashville. He has made a home there, is a member of Pentecostal church, and is becoming more and more recognizable in the area, although he is occasionally mistaken for other professional athletes.

"I ran into one guy who thought I was [former Tennessee Titans defensive end] Jevon Kearse," he said with a laugh.

Regardless of where Beck fights, he will come in focused on his ultimate goal and an unwavering strategy.

"When I go in there," said Beck, "I just go for the knockout. I just go in there to do what I do best, which is put in a good performance, break him down, and then knock him out."