

## Pawal Wolak Brings His Lunch Pail

Written by Zachary Levin

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There's nothing delicate or flashy about the Polish-American junior middleweight Pawal Wolak, who expects to up his record to 8-0 tonight at a club show in Huntington, Long Island. Wolak is the very definition of a "blue-collar" fighter, a guy who brings his "lunch pail" when he does battle in the squared circle. Which is to say, he ain't pretty to look at and he don't make it look easy. He huffs and puffs, he grinds away. Yeah, he's no cutie, but he gets the job done—by applying pipe-busting pressure, by getting up in your chest, by throwing so many punches submitting seems like the best idea you've had all day.

The snub-nosed 23-year-old wears an impassive expression when he enters the concrete slab that houses Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn. He fashions his hair in a soldier-style buzz cut that begins so low on his forehead, it threatens to meet his dark eyes. Both his street and gym clothes are humble and plain. He has the stocky build of an ordinary construction worker, which belies the awesome strength and conditioning he's pounded in it. Unless you've strained against him in the ring, you might not believe he squatted 600 pounds, that as a high school wrestler in New Jersey he made "states" all four years. If you were judging him by his non-existent 6-pack and not the 1,200 punches he threw in that day's sparring, you wouldn't know that while you slept, he was doing his daily roadwork at 4:30 A.M.: A 20-minute, puke-inducing loop he runs around the Brooklyn and Manhattan bridges.

Wolak's trainer Don Saxby says his fighter's got "It." Not because the boxer's a natural athlete, but because he's got what Saxby calls "positive aggression"—a fighter's mentality with some science mixed in—and "crowd control"—an ability to block out everything but the task at hand. The trainer knows his charge is a work-in-progress and is trying to slick him up, have him move his head more, get inside at angles with nimble footwork, and take advantage of a stiff jab he often neglects.

When asked what his hopes are for his boxing career, Wolak concedes that he wants what every undefeated pro likely aspires to, a world championship. In lieu of this, he just wants to be considered a "hardnosed" guy. Outside the ring, it's surprisingly easy to breakdown his tough exterior if you approach him correctly. Then, he is accessible and friendly. He claims when he's in civilian-mode he has always been a Teddy Bear—no fights, no trouble. If so, he's not a pristine FAO Schwartz job but the kind with patchy fur, lashed to the grill of an 18-wheeler.

Wolak's family moved to New Jersey from a small village in southern Poland when he was 10. He says he assimilated quickly and became your basic All-American kid in a little town outside Morristown. In high school, he developed an obsession with wrestling and heavy weight lifting during the off-season.

His parents sacrificed to provide Pawal with a college education. While in school, Wolak took up boxing after dabbling in kickboxing. After peeling off 20 pounds of solid weight lifting muscle, Wolak amassed an amateur record of 40-5. He earned a Bachelor's in Business from Berkeley College in Manhattan last year and, before he was able to frame the diploma, had his first pro

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fight. Meanwhile, he began working for a small jewelry company, at first as a machinist and soon becoming a top manager of the outfit. It's not clear where sleep or a social life fits into his hectic calendar.

Wolak's first seven opponents—four of whom have lost by TKO—have been easy fair, with a combined 7-19-2. But his last opponent, Kareem Robinson, was a scrappy 6'2" Philly fighter, and the younger brother of Ivan Robinson. This evening, he's taking a step up in facing journeyman Julio Jean (7-5-1). A native of Port Au Prince, Haiti, Jean is a sizeable middleweight whose losses have come to promising undefeated prospects like Elvin Ayala, James McGirt Jr. and Henry Buchanan. He goes the distance and is not easily knocked off his feet.

What can we expect to happen tonight in this six-round undercard? "It's gonna be a good fight. That's all I can say." Wolak smiles, licking his chops at the thought of imminent warfare. "It's gonna be a good, fast-paced, a-lot-of-punches fight."

Done talking, Wolak pursed his lips and his mouth became small and grim. He was back to his natural state, wanting to work, prepared to punish whoever stands in his way.