

And the winner is ... the heavyweight division

Written by Rick Folstad
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While this fight won't single-handedly jerk the slumping heavyweight division back to its feet, it could help it regain some of its dignity.

Complete recovery? That might require years of therapy. Hope for a Tysonesque effort from someone with Ali's charisma, George Foreman's right hand and Rocky Marciano's chin.

Still, the WBO and IBF mandatory box-off between Samuel "The Nigerian Nightmare" Peter and Wladimir "Doc" Klitschko on Sept. 24 at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic City (HBO) has the potential to pump a little life into a dying division, at least for a night.

Why? Because between them, the two fighters have 61 knockouts in 71 fights. Those are eye-popping numbers, the kind of numbers that sell tickets and spell doom. Someone's career will soar after this fight. Someone's will take a dive.

While Peter's record is unscathed at 24-0 with 21 KOs, Klitschko's record of 44-3 with 40 KOs has a couple serious flaws in it. He was stopped in the fifth round by Lamon Brewster in April 2004, and he lost to Corrie Sanders in two ugly rounds back in March 2003.

They were devastating losses and together, they pretty well knocked Klitschko out of the heavyweight picture.

Until now.

A win over Peter would bring him back into contention.

"Each of these fighters has a different reason for taking this fight," said promoter Dino Duva on a conference call this week. "It's a high risk, but if you look at the other side, it has high benefits."

High risk? If Klitschko loses this fight, he should seriously consider a career in the medical field, maybe teaching.

"He needs to prove he's still one of the best in the world," Duva said. "There's still a lot of questions."

Yeah, like the composition of his chin.

While Klitschko is trying to recapture respectability in the division, Peter wants to prove he belongs there.

"This is a big step for Peter," Duva said. "The winner of this fight gets the mandatory. The key in this fight is that both fighters are willing to risk everything. Neither guy is even thinking about

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losing. They should be recognized for stepping up to the plate and taking this fight. And [whoever] loses, don't punish them for it. It would be better to reward the loser in this fight than to reward a fighter who takes on a bum and beats him."

Klitschko was his usual accommodating self on the conference call, saying he has trained to go 12 rounds, though no one really expects it to last that long.

"I'll go as many rounds as I need to go," Klitschko said. "My workout is the same as usual. I didn't change my schedule a lot."

Klitschko said coming into the fight as an underdog has helped him get psyched for the fight.

"It inspires me to get into the ring and fight," he said. "Boxing is like a chess match. You have different plans on what you're going to do, and the best plan will work."

As for his two losses, Klitschko said he's learned from his setbacks.

"I think it's very important to know both sides of the coin (winning and losing)," he said. "I'm not worried about my confidence."

The Nigerian Nightmare? He didn't have a lot to say. It was like trying to talk to a guy who just had his new Lexus stolen. His answers were short and right to the point.

"Nothing is going to stop me," he said in one of his longer outbursts. "I have no doubt about this fight. I have been training very hard. I'm going to win."

Hopefully, so will the heavyweight division.