

## Klitschko-Peter: Everyone's guess

Written by Patrick Kehoe

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If you didn't know the state of boxing today – not that many sports fans care to – your eye might pass right over the listings citing Nigerian heavyweight Samuel Peter taking on former WBO heavyweight champion Wladimir Klitschko on Saturday night in Atlantic City. Boxing fans, and fanatics who love only the madhouse known as the heavyweight division, can appreciate that something special will be taking place from the Boardwalk Hall, for HBO subscribers. Oddly though, it's really the result, the registering of the victimization of the loser and the necessary powering finality of one man being lumbered to the canvas that's really at issue here. "Of course," one might say, "that's heavyweight boxing." Indeed. And yet understanding the result of Klitschko-Peter is where semantics come to play, come back to roost. In addition, HBO has found the perfect win-win formula with this slugger beware showdown of opposites.

Semantics tend to get tangled up when we are trying to describe the favorite heading into this fight, as opposed to the most commercially beneficial result or the better fighter on paper, or on form, or the fighter with the most to gain or the man with the most to lose, if he's the last man standing with the referee cradling him. Fairly intelligible arguments could be made either way, highlighting various sets of possible outcomes for either fighter. Not really; this fight's a no-brainer.

To indulge in such analysis would be to perpetuate a kind of media con. Did you realize that few, if anyone in boxing, thinks the result of this fight is really in doubt. At least off the record. You see what we mean by semantics?

On the one hand the suits at HBO are smart enough to know that it's Sam Peter who has most of the top heavyweights talking, when on those rare occasions they are not talking about themselves. Among the fraternity of managers, Peter's the emerging danger guy in the heavyweight division. Dangerous contender Mr. Peter, the guy they would least like to be mandated, pressured into or in any way coursed into matching their "heavyweight" with. How interesting, when one considers that Klitschko, until his Hanover meltdown, used to own that distinction. Yes, it was the ides of March, 2003, a supposedly secure showcase WBO "championship" homemade in Germany that became a debacle, courtesy of semi-pro golfer Corrie Sanders. The South African Sanders had that gun of a left cross blazing, with "the steelhammer" bleeding and basically being over run. Down went Klitschko; down went Klitschko; down went Klitschko! Hanover boxing fans, many in resplendent attire sat in hushed amazement after less than four minutes of fighting.

Right now the consensus says he's got to do something brutish and spectacular to Peter before anyone's going to be afraid of him again. Because right now, no one inside of the top 10 in the division is afraid of fighting Klitschko the Younger. Coming off his blown tire performance against Lamon Brewster, not even the eminent Emanuel Stewart seems a magical enough figure to get Wlad's mojo back.

Yes, Stewart has Klitschko training at altitude in the Poconos in northeast Pennsylvania,

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keying on sparring time and that long left jab as a rangefinder. You see there again, only the epic ending, the result counts in the gigantic theater of the absurd that is super-heavyweight boxing. For all of his fresh faced youthful Adonis qualities – he's still not thirty – Klitschko the fighter comes to mind more of the exhausted figure literally punched out by his own ability to bludgeon Lamon Brewster round after round. Klitschko was Ali and Foreman rolled into one, Ali early, Foreman late.

Where once he seemed like an attacking fortress, brushing aside a still primed Chris Byrd or an enthused Monte Barrett with pole axing power shots, he now looks like a tower block ready for demolition. The condition of his heart remains partly dis-informing diagnostics and partly a psychological quandary. Still, boxing insiders and broadcasting entities love to micro-analyze, putting the best of the past as possible performance capacity, no matter the odds, no matter the probability. In the days leading up to the fight we are being sold the idea of Klitschko's viability, the notion he remains a force to be contended with in heavyweight championship boxing.

Team Peter is just as happy to let the fiction ride. Their guy might be awkward in the extreme and still shy of top level competition, but they are not worried. How can Klitschko, even at 6'6", hope to keep off a guy willing to wing three right crosses in a row? True, Peter might be a block of a heavyweight, carrying upward of 250 on a 6'0" frame. Still, his limited height hasn't seemed to stop him from hunting down bigger men, as he's managed to register twenty stoppages in his twenty-four professional fights. And he does savage those who are in the ring with him; surely that's a defining element heading into this "title eliminator" of a fight. Basically, the 24-year-old swings so awkwardly, with such momentous force, it doesn't matter the quality of defense in front of him. The theory seems to be he's got a chin right out of countryman Ike Ibeabuchi; perhaps that's PR, perhaps not.

Waiting to see this fight is not like watching a car crash. It's more like knowing that a car crash is going to happen, knowing the name of the fatality injured person, letting your watch tell you it's time to go outside at just the crucial instant to see it all for yourself, dispassionately fascinated with the horrific spectacle.

But what were we saying about semantics and misconceptions? No one, except a paid PR spokesperson, would be sounding out the name of Klitschko as the obvious winner in waiting. HBO would take a Klitschko KO as KLITSCHKO REBORN and take that result all the way to some kind of heavyweight "championship" showdown or another, assuredly; Larry Merchant at the ready, his darting cynicism for remanufactured authenticity, a knife ready to be wielded.

But don't bank on it. HBO will try to make some ripples out of what most expect will be Sam Peter's big bang arrival, chart as celestial a course as the next big something or other in heavyweight boxing. Besides, we will have to get the return of James Toney and Vitali Klitschko out of our system before Sam Peter can be matched to our liking. Chris Byrd and John Ruiz's admirable ability to hang around will have to be dealt with, as will the basic threats of Lamon Brewster and Calvin Brock. No wonder Dino Duva, Peter's promoter, doesn't mind being anyone's mandatory, be it the WBO or the IBF.

Duva knows that people are going to have to be forced to fight their guy. Klitschko's desperate,

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at the end of his relevance, so in a sense he needs Peter and all of that expectation of success, as much as Peter needs a major "name" on his growing CV. HBO, as we said before, wouldn't mind an upset. The upset being if the name fighter – Klitschko – could get a big knockout win and set up an interesting rematch with Lamon Brewster. Don King won't exactly be sorry to have that pre-sold fight fall into his ever eager hands. Of such things are dreams made.

Peter winning big gives HBO something to wet the aficionado's lips with, not a lot else. Jim Lampley will pronounce the arrival of "perhaps the most danger force in boxing since a youthful Mike Tyson." No problem Lamps. As exciting as Peter may fight, he comes off as an off-the-radar kinda fellow outside of the ring. One suspects not even HBO's biopic, video clean introductions can translate Peter as something larger than life to this generation of mostly punked out, TV is reality boxing fans. But as a live entertainer, a dark destroyer kinda menace marauding with intent, he might sell well in the major markets, live.

Then again, let the fighters, on the night, settle the issues of irony and irritation, of victor and vanquished. History only matters in the just transgressed moment, deeds of meaning done, decided. In boxing, certainties have a way of becoming anyone's guess.