

## Brewster defends against Krasniqi – just in case you didn't know

Written by JE Grant

Monday, 26 September 2005 19:00

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Right from the start, Lamon Brewster's Hamburg, Germany defense of his WBO heavyweight belt against unknown Luan Krasniqi scheduled for Sept. 28th epitomizes the growing obscurity of the heavyweight championship.

This so-called world heavyweight title fight will not be televised in the United States. You won't find it on pay-per-view, HBO or Showtime, or even ESPN2. What gives?

Of course the answer lies in the fact that in today's boxing scene there are four men who have staked out a claim to the title "world" champion.

The various titles have so diluted the limited attention champions garner from the public that this one is relegated to being just about club status for serious media coverage.

WBC titlist Vitali Klitschko, based primarily on his losing, though spirited, effort against Lennox Lewis gets most of the headlines and is considered the true champion by The Ring magazine, the self-appointed harbinger of the purist ethos of boxing.

IBF belt holder Chris Byrd is the longest reigning of the titlists. He even sports a victory over Vitali in a WBO match. That alone, some would suggest, qualifies him for the title above the others. His loss to Wladimir Klitschko and some recent questionable decisions, plus the fact that the 35-year old has fought only once in the last year, make his claim shaky.

John Ruiz, the almost indomitable WBA belt wearer, stretches the boxing public's patience to the point of breaking for his clutch and grab style. Add to that the loss to Roy Jones and the loss-later-ruled-no contest to James Toney and there are not many people who picture Ruiz as the champ. But for some reason that WBA seems stuck to him – he may be the first champion that cannot be beaten even when he's beaten.

Recent rumors of a Ruiz defense against Kevin McBride certainly don't strengthen his claim. Still, he has wins over Hasim Rahman, Fres Oquendo, and a greatly diminished Evander Holyfield.

And, that leaves us at Lamon Brewster.

The WBO belt, held at times by Vitali Klitschko, Chris Byrd, Wladimir Klitschko and Corrie Sanders, had never proven particularly valuable, until then-belt holder Wladimir began to capture the public's imagination in what looked like an inevitable climb to the top as heir apparent to Lennox Lewis.

Virtually no one thought of Vitali as a champion when he wore the WBO belt. When he lost it to Chris Byrd, the Michigan southpaw remained almost anonymous.

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Wladimir, upon taking the WBO strap from Byrd, steadily gained popularity in the United States through five defenses of the once-obscure trinket. Victories over the likes of Derrick Jefferson and Jameel McCline, aired on HBO, earned him high marks.

That all tumbled down when Klitschko was felled by the South African power-puncher Sanders.

Sanders apparently did not accept that the title was meaningful despite the relative prominence of Klitschko. He dumped the belt and petitioned for a rating with the WBC, promptly losing a one-sided challenge to Wladimir's brother Vitali.

Of course Wladimir was not finished with the WBO. He was pitted against the little known Brewster in a bout for Sanders' vacated belt that was to showcase the successful return of the younger Klitschko. Lamon entered the ring in Hamburg, Germany on April 10, 2004 a decided underdog.

After all, he dropped two one-sided decisions to journeymen; one to Cliff Etienne, who would go on to a one-round kayo loss to Mike Tyson, and a stoppage over Nikolai Valuev before returning to prison.

The other loss was to Charles Shufford – a one-time George Foreman imitator in the Will Smith movie "Ali" – but more importantly an easy knockout victim at the hands of young Wladimir.

Following the Shufford bout, he engaged in a five-fight win-streak against the likes of Joe Lenhart and Willie Chapman, fighters with losing records. He had done nothing to inspire awe in the Klitschko camp. Brewster was to be a fighter with a good win-loss record and only a short stop along Klitschko's path to superstardom.

The fight Brewster opened much as observers expected. The taller and faster Klitschko pummeled Brewster with both cannons. Brewster took a ferocious whipping for four rounds including a visit to the canvas.

Then came the fifth round and Klitschko's tank ran dry as Brewster came back to life hurting the exhausted Klitschko as the round closed. Although Klitschko beat the count, he was clearly spent and the fight was stopped as he headed for his corner.

Lamon Brewster had beaten the "heir apparent." More importantly for him was the fact that some of the luster of the Klitschko name transferred to him and his WBO title now had more meaning than it ever had before.

Brewster did little to enhance the worth of the title in his first defense, capturing a razor-thin 12 round decision over top 20-ish Kali Meehan Sept. 4, 2004. Many thought his reign would rapidly come to an end.

He was pitted against the enigmatic Andrew Golota, May 21, 2005. Golota was a man who, in successive fights, fought to a questionable draw with Chris Byrd for the IBF title and another question decision loss to John Ruiz – many at ringside had Golota winning both matches.

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Based on his effort against Meehan, Brewster entered the ring once again as the underdog. Ignoring the odds, Brewster blasted Golota in the opening round, sending him to the deck three times and forcing a stoppage less than one minute into the fight.

Almost simultaneously Krasniqi was earning his title shot fighting in a far away place against a far different class of opponents.

Only a few Americans know the 34-year transplanted Kosovar. Some may remember him as an Olympian. Some may have seen his recent victory over Lance Whitaker May 28, 2005. To date it is his only victory over anyone who was ever close to being an upper tier heavyweight.

His bout with Whitaker was billed as being a WBO eliminator. Krasniqi was vaulted into the eliminator based on his draw with Timo Hoffmann Dec. 4, 2004 in a European title fight. One can only speculate as to how a draw with a journeyman suddenly makes one a top contender.

Before that his only opponent of note was Sinan Samil Sam whom he beat by majority decision to gain the European title Feb. 14, 2004.

He enters his bout with Brewster with only one loss, an on-the-stool stoppage at the hands of Przemyslaw Saleta on July 20, 2002. In 2003 he avenged the loss by stopping Saleta in one round. Some readers may recall that Saleta was recently belted out in four rounds by 40-year-old Oliver McCall.

From the snippets of tape and memories of his bronze medal in the 1996 Atlanta games, one can see that Krasniqi has skills but only modest power – despite being the first man to stop Whitaker.

Little is known about his chin because of the limited opposition he's faced. He simply hasn't met a top puncher.

In fact one could say that he has not yet actually faced a top ten fighter. Whitaker was once close to the top ten but each time he tinkered near the top he suffered setbacks in key bouts with Lou Savarese and Jameel McCline.

At a shade over 6'3" he will have a two-inch height advantage over Brewster. The fighters, who fought a week apart in their last bouts, were only one-pound apart in weight, with Krasniqi coming in at 225 against Whitaker and Brewster tipping the scales at 224 against Golota.

The real difference between the two will likely be in power. Brewster crushed the bigger, ostensibly stronger Golota. He also watched Wladimir Klitschko overtake the latest power-hitting sensation Samuel Peter, knowing full well that he was able to stop Klitschko. His confidence could not be at a higher level.

Brewster may, however, find fighting in Germany disconcerting. He undoubtedly realizes that many debatable decisions have given many fighters real hesitancy about fighting there. An attempt to overcompensate by pushing for an early knockout could prove disastrous should the

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bout go into the later rounds.

Krasniqi, despite his Olympic experience, has likely never faced the power Brewster has shown of late. As a 34-year-old fighter his ability to make the necessary adjustments in the most high-pressure fight of his life is a major question mark.

Of course U.S. viewers won't see any of it and win or lose Krasniqi will remain a mystery. The fight will be broadcast on the German network ZDF.

Hopefully the winner decides to face one of the other belt holders to end the nonsense of the four-belt title. A true champion can emerge whose fights will be seen far and wide and not simply as a highlight reel or internet posting.

My prediction?

Krasniqi will face a buzz saw for the first time in his life. The lackluster opponents he's faced in Germany will not have prepared him well enough for the charging Brewster. Krasniqi's chance lies in taking this fight long and keeping Brewster at bay.

For his part, Brewster has not been particularly difficult to reach. He must get under Krasniqi and stick to him throughout the contest. If he attempts an outside boxing match he could jeopardize his belt.

My bet is Brewster will do what he does best and put the heat on early and often. Krasniqi may prove able to keep Brewster off for a time but the power will tell in the end. Lamon Brewster will punish Krasniqi and pull him out of his game. The wilting Krasniqi will finish the fight on the seat of his pants. Brewster by knockout in round 8.