

Boxing's Boy Scout Vitali Klitschko

Written by Rick Folstad
Monday, 31 October 2005 19:00

This guy just won't play along.

He doesn't talk trash, doesn't call anyone names, and he doesn't make obscene gestures from across the table. He seldom raises his voice, never curses in English and he probably helps old ladies cross the street when he's sure no one's watching.

So what's wrong this guy?

WBC heavyweight champ Vitali Klitschko (35-2, 34 KOs) doesn't belong to a Boy Scout troop and he hasn't recently volunteered to work the soup line at St. Joe's. But give him time. He's been busy with the sore back and everything. A small spur on his spine had to be removed, if there is such a thing as a "small" spur on your spine. That put him on the shelf for several months.

And there's also that big fight coming up. That's kept him kind of occupied. Has filled his days. Maybe he'll spend a few afternoons visiting the kids in the children's ward at St. Mercy after the fight. How about around Thanksgiving?

Fine.

In the meantime, he's got to defend his title against former heavyweight champ Hasim Rahman (41-5-1) on Nov. 12 at the Thomas and Mack Center in Las Vegas (HBO pay-per-view). This isn't going to be an easy fight for Klitschko if Rahman comes in with his teeth bared, his ears pinned back and his chin tucked. That's because Rahman is tough when he wants to be. But he's also been known to take long vacations in the middle of an easy fight.

Write it down, Hasim. This isn't an easy fight.

But apparently, Rahman, who briefly held the heavyweight title in 2001 when he stopped Lennox Lewis, disagrees. He predicts a KO in nine rounds. Or less.

"The first four or five rounds will be an all out-war," Rahman said on a recent conference call. "After the fifth, he belongs to me. He'll throw in the towel between the fifth and ninth."

Something to watch for, but don't build your plans around it.

"I truly believe I'm going to hit him harder than he's ever been hit," Rahman said. "We'll see how he responds."

The Boy Scout, who hasn't fought since last December, won't make any kind of bold prediction. He'll just tell you it won't go the distance.

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"We have option A, option B and option C," Klitschko said. "And we developed these strategies for [anything] in the ring. I will be in great condition for all 12 rounds, but I don't believe the fight will be all 12 rounds."

Throwing in the towel isn't one of the options listed.

"The long break was not good, but I feel great," he said. "I'm really hungry right now because the break was so long."

While Rahman sounds like a guy preparing for an evening stroll through the park, Klitschko sounds like he's quietly prepared to go to war.

"[Rahman] is one of the strongest heavyweights in the world right now," Klitschko said. "The biggest mistake would be to [underestimate] him. Every single punch could decide the result of the fight. He's a big puncher and a good boxer."

Rahman, meanwhile, said he's just waiting to be sworn in as the next heavyweight champ.

"My comeback won't be complete until I win the title," he said. "I will not be denied."

Klitschko still won't be playing along.