

Boxing News: Don King Declares Rahman Champ

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DEERFIELD BEACH, Fla.(November 6, 2005) – After World Boxing Council heavyweight champion Vitali Klitschko suffered the latest in a series of training injuries this week that forced him to pull out of a mandatory defense of his title this Saturday in Las Vegas against WBC interim champion Hasim “The Rock” Rahman, Rahman’s promoter Don King has proclaimed Rahman the undisputed WBC heavyweight champion and says his longtime goal of creating a heavyweight tournament to determine a single, undisputed world heavyweight champion will now be achieved.

“Anyone could tell that Vitali did not want to fight Rock,” King said. “This is why I lobbied for Rock’s last fight to be for the WBC interim heavyweight title. The moment Vitali cancelled his scheduled mandatory defense scheduled for November 12, he vacated his title and Rahman immediately assumed his crown according to the rules and regulations of the WBC.”

King added: “I would have preferred for Rahman and Klitschko to have settled their differences in the ring this coming weekend, but nobody seems to be able to make Vitali fight his mandatory defense against Rahman. He seems to prefer to give up his title rather than face Rock.”

Rahman believes the WBC will announce that he is the undisputed WBC heavyweight champion.

“I told WBC President Jose Sulaiman when I became their interim heavyweight champion in August by defeating Monte Barrett that I didn’t think Vitali would fight me. Mr. Sulaiman said that if he pulled out of the fight, he would declare me the WBC champion.

“Thank you, Mr. Sulaiman, for upholding the rules, regulations, honor, dignity and integrity of the WBC, the best sanctioning organization in boxing.”

Rahman added that he was disappointed, but it came as no surprise to him that Klitschko claimed a knee injury suffered in training caused him to pull out of their Nov. 12 match.

“Vitali said we couldn’t fight because he had a leg injury in April that spread to his back in July,” Rahman said. “Then he wasn’t well enough to fight me in August but he was well enough to want to fight Oleg Maskaev or Calvin Brock in September.

“Now he says he’s headed to Colorado to see a knee specialist this week so he can’t fight me on Saturday.”

The necessity for an interim title match occurred after Klitschko postponed three matches with Rahman: April 30 (postponed due to Vitali’s jogging “thigh injury”); June 18 (postponed as Vitali needed more time to recover from “jogging injury”); and July 23 (Vitali’s “thigh injury” spread to his back, necessitating “minor back surgery”) on April 19.

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King responded in May by successfully petitioning the WBC to sanction an interim heavyweight championship—at a cost of almost \$2 million to Don King Productions—owing to Klitschko's repeated inability to face his mandatory challenger, Rahman, who earned that position on Nov. 13, 2004, and has been waiting to fight Vitali since that time.

Klitschko inexplicably petitioned the WBC in June asking for an exception to face another fighter on Sept. 24—in effect saying he was healthy enough to fight, just not against Rahman.

The WBC Board of Governors rejected the petition on July 15 and ordered Klitschko to face the WBC interim champion, which was determined on Aug. 13 when WBC No. 1-ranked mandatory challenger Rahman won a unanimous decision over WBC No. 2-ranked, and No. 2 mandatory challenger, Monte "Two Gunz" Barrett.

King now represents all four world heavyweight champions: World Boxing Association champion John "The Quietman" Ruiz; International Boxing Federation champion Chris Byrd; World Boxing Organization champion "Relentless" Lamon Brewster; and Rahman.

Ruiz will meet his mandatory challenger Nicolai Valuev in a previously scheduled match on Dec. 17 in Berlin, Germany. Rahman must next fight an opponent designated by the WBC.

After these matches, King plans to announce a tournament where all world heavyweight champions will fight each other to determine an undisputed champion. He expects the format to be similar to the 1986 box-off that produced the youngest heavyweight champion in history, Mike Tyson, and the 2001 Middleweight World Championship Series, which resulted in the first undisputed middleweight world champion since Marvelous Marvin Hagler held that distinction in 1987.