

Top 25 Heavyweights (As of December 1, 2005)

Written by JE Grant

Wednesday, 30 November 2005 19:00

The sudden departure from the scene by Vitali Klitschko has just as suddenly generated interest in a unification series – at least that’s the talk of Don King, the man who holds promotional rights for all four of the current titlists. That apperant can be upset soon, however, as WBA belt holder John Ruiz meets “The Beast from the East” Nicolay Valuev in December. Additional talk of Chris Byrd trying to fly the coup could also mean trouble for DK.

However, don’t bet on outcomes that will derail a Don-only tournament. Ruiz will likely be favored against the Valuev despite the big man’s 42-0 record. When the big men rumble in Berlin in December anything can happen.

As for Byrd, don’t count on seeing King losing in any court action. He is the heavyweight champion of the courtroom. Also don’t plan on ever seeing Byrd take on his number one challenger, Wladimir Klitschko. Byrd, who recently came oh-so-close to accusing Wladimir of being on steroids going into their 2000 bout, has been grasping for years to explain that loss. It is at least possible that he lost because he is not as good a boxer, he’s not as fast, he can’t punch as hard, he’s smaller etc... Maybe, just maybe, he’s just not as good. Despite all of that, Byrd is still a top fighter and not many contenders can find a way to beat him.

Hasim Rahman has shown no reluctance to meet fighters who present a threat to his well being. He may be a long-term project for Klitschko, however, because talk is shifting to a James Toney defense. Don’t be surprised to see Klitschko agree to a fight with winner with the stipulation that he enters a King tournament and a defense or two.

Of course Toney should not be able to jump over Klitschko (or Oleg Maskaev the ostensible number one WBC contender with his recent win over the then-number 1 Sinan Samil Sam) but don’t try to get there through any kind of logic. Read more on this debacle at [WBC makes Toney mandatory in bizarre ruling](#)

Not talked about enough is Lamon Brewster. Brewster has a personality and style that excites all who witness it. His last fight, a successful defense against Luan Krasniqi, was not televised in the U.S. If this type of situation persists it dooms the division’s marketability in the states. Brewster deserves better.

1. Hasim Rahman, USA (Last Month #2) He is now the heavyweight champion in the eyes of the WBC. He must now prove his mettle in the ring. It looks like James Toney is next – unfairly – and it is a tough climb. Unification and defeat of Wladimir Klitschko must be in his near future if he wants to be seen as the true champion. Now is the time to set things right.

2. Lamon Brewster, USA– WBO Champion (Last month #3) So far there’s nothing on the horizon for “Relentless.” Wladimir Klitschko is the next mandatory but Brewster just beat Krasniqi in a mandatory so he can bypass Wlad for a while. Given that Don King promotes him,

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don't expect to see him in with Klitschko soon. Perhaps the beginning of a unification series is in store for him. We're waiting.

3. Wladimir Klitschko, Ukraine(Last month #4) As the only fighting Klitschko left, this young man has all the pressure on his shoulders to pull in another belt. While he is the ostensible mandatory for Chris Byrd and Lamon Brewster, look for him to be frozen out. The WBC already skipped right over him to give James Toney a shot. If all of the belt holders thought he was a shot fighter a few months ago, the Samuel Peter fight made them think that perhaps he has some juice left. He may be the first major heavyweight fighter in many, many years to not get a title despite being either the number one or highest available contender.

4. James Toney, USA(Last month #5) Suddenly Toney goes from the WBC number 5 contender to being the mandatory challenger for Hasim Rahman. Never mind that number 1 Sinan Samil Sam lost to number 2 Oleg Maskaev. Never mind that number 3 Wladimir Klitschko beat number 7 Samuel Peter. Never mind that number 8 Juan Carlos Gomez beat number 4 Oliver McCall. Never mind that Toney, in his last fight, beat Dominick Guinn – a fighter who is not ranked in the top 40 of the organization's ratings. No, the WBC sees the number 5 guy as the next mandatory. Listen, the ratings are indeed goofy but it just shows that even the organization itself does not see them as meaningful.

5. Chris Byrd, USA – IBF Champion (Last month #6) The disappearance of Vitali Klitschko was a blow to the future earning potential of Byrd. The Michigan fighter has talent and has always given his best. A defense against Wladimir Klitschko would possibly spell the end of his reign and it probably won't happen anytime soon. He also has promoter problems. Could we see him go back into hibernation for nearly a year again? You're 35 Chris; get back into the ring soon.

6. Calvin Brock, USA(Last month #7) He beat journeyman David Bostice in a 12-rounder Nov. 19th and is now set to face Tua in January. While he failed to impress – Bostice has been knocked out three times previously – the workout could prove beneficial. No one knocks out Tua. Nonetheless, Brock is the real thing and you can expect that to show through against Tua.

7. Audley Harrison, England(Last month #8) With Vitali Klitschko gone look for this big man to wear one or more belts by the summer of 2006. Only Wladimir approaches him in natural talent. It may turnout that he is in fact the complete package. Mark my words – he will be a belt holder by the end of 2006. He's set for a December all-British showdown with Danny Williams.

8. Samuel Peter, Nigeria(Last month #9) He's scheduled to face Robert Hawkins on Dec. 5. Good move. Hawkins is coming off a victory over tough Robert Wiggins. We'll get a chance to see if Peter learned from his first peek at division's elite against Wladimir Klitschko.

9. John Ruiz, USA - WBA Champion (Last month #11) When Ruiz meets giant Nicolay Valuev in Berlin in December he will give up nine inches in height and almost 100 pounds in weight. Valuev has been busy and winning – if not all that impressively – and may prove maul-proof due to his size. In truth – and take a big gulp before you read this – Ruiz is a much more skilled and able fighter than Valuev. Believe it or not he probably punches better as well. Despite his

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enormous wingspan, Valuev is not especially adept at keeping opponents at bay. Larry Donald was able to hit him almost at will. Nonetheless, this is a difficult encounter for Ruiz.

10. Monte Barrett, USA (Last month #10) Quiet as a mouse since losing to Hasim Rahman in what turned out to be a heavyweight title fight.

11. Nicolay Valuev, Russia (Last month #12) Despite his Russian origin, in his meeting with John Ruiz in Berlin he will be the hometown hero. Valuev is quite popular in Germany and he actually has some skills. Whether he can bring it all together against Ruiz, a fighter who finds ways to win, is difficult to gauge. Ruiz has more tricks in his bag than Valuev – many of which are distasteful to view. This one could go either way but I lean toward Ruiz.

12. David Tua, New Zealand (Last month #13) He gets a chance to return to the top 10 when he meets Calvin Brock in January. He'll have to be much better than he was against Cisse Salif if he is to get past the busy and skilled Brock.

13. DaVarryl Williamson, USA (Last month #14) According to a news release on his website he underwent surgery in October on his right elbow following his title-shot loss to Chris Byrd and will be out 6-8 weeks.

14. Danny Williams, England (Last month #15) His chances against Audley Harrison are slim. A win, however, guarantees him at least one big all-British fight against Matt Skelton or a major U.S. contender. Expect this one to be his last gasp and last big payday.

15. Oleg Maskaev, Uzbekistan (Last month #16) He zoomed past Sinan Samil Sam in a WBC title eliminator and won something called the WBC International title. Coming into the bout he was ranked number 2 while Sam was number 1. His so-called reward for beating the so-called number 1 fighter was to see the number 5 James Toney zoom past him to a mandatory title shot. Obviously most boxing people don't think Maskaev and Sam are number 1 material, but how can anyone ever see the WBC ratings as meaningful again?

16. Shannon Briggs, USA (Last month #17) He scored a first round knockout over someone named Brian Scott on November 26th in Fort Smith, Arkansas. The bout served the purpose of keeping the former top contender busy and setting up a big payday.

17. Serguei Lyakhovich, Belarus (Last month #18) It has now been a full year since his last fight. No status update on an injury that has kept him sidelined since then.

18. Ray Austin, USA (Last month #19) In his two fights this year he settled for a draw with Larry Donald and he upset Owen Beck by decision. The WBC saw fit to push him to number 6 in its latest ratings published on the organization's website. Given that number 5 James Toney is now the mandatory challenger, logic would have it that another win by Austin over anyone could propel him into a title shot. Never know.

19. Matt Skelton, England (Last month #20) Scheduled to face John McDermott in defense of his British crown in December. A win could mean a match against the Harrison-Williams fight.

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20. Ruslan Chagaev, Uzbekistan (Last month #23) The undefeated Uzbeki is scheduled for a December in Germany against an opponent yet to be named.

21. Sultan Ibragimov, Russia (Last month unranked) He and his upcoming opponent Lance Whitaker are scheduled to go at December 15th in Florida, but at their recent press conference announcing the fight they rumbled in front the world for free. It is a commentary on the relative state of the sport that such an event draws mention on the sports shows but when the best fighter in the world, Floyd Mayweather beats an honestly ranked top 10 fighter it's as if it never happened. Maybe they should do it again. A win over Whitaker will prove a major boost to go along with a relatively recent stoppage win over the suddenly hot Zuri Lawrence.

22. Juan Carlos Gomez, Cuba (living in Germany) (Last month unranked) Gomez is ranked number 8 by the WBC and he recently beat number 4 Oliver McCall. We all know that neither of them should be in the top 10 but it is interesting to see that he is now frozen out of contention for the time being despite his victory. James Toney gets the nod due to his recent victory over Dominick Guinn, a fighter no where to be found in the WBC's top 40. Yes 40.

23. Luan Krasniqi, Germany (Last month #24) On his website he says he's going to fight again but doesn't have an opponent scheduled. He needs a hot streak very quickly if he is to ever have a title chance again.

24. Zuri Lawrence, USA (Last month #25) Still basking in the glory of his victory over Jameel McCline. He needs another win over a name fighter to realize a major payday – the fact that he has no knockouts in his 35 fights doesn't sell all that well.

25. Jameel McCline, USA (Last month unranked) Following his loss to Zuri Lawrence in October, he came right back with a first round knockout over Andy Sample in November. No one is reading much into the win because it certainly was not against a top foe. Nonetheless, McCline is smart enough to keep plugging along and it will likely pay off in the form of at least one more money fight.

SPECIAL MENTION: **Vitali Klitschko**, Ukraine – WBC Champion (Last Month #1) Last month we worried that the Klitschko-Rahman bout would end up being "Wait and See" instead of "Seek and Destroy" as billed. Little did we know that it would mean yet another delay – forever. Klitschko may have seen his last days in the boxing ring, but we suspect he will move on to bigger and better things outside the squared circle. Strangely, the WBC says that if comes back he will be installed as the instant mandatory challenger. Does anyone take the WBC seriously anymore?

Others on the fringes in no particular order:

Dominick Guinn, USA (Last month #21) – It's back to the drawing board for this one-time prospect. There is unmistakable talent but there are unmistakable lapses. He'll need to figure it all out or he won't ever compete for the crown.

Lance Whitaker, USA – He did something almost no fighter has been able to do in quite some

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time and that is get himself on the news section of the cable sports channels with his brawl with Ibragimov. Perhaps a win could get him back in the mix. He still needs to clean up the Krasniqi mess he left.

Alexander Dimitrenko, Ukraine – He is now signed to fight Rob Calloway in January. Calloway is king of the club circuit. He has won nine consecutive fights since being knocked out by Hasim Rahman. Calloway has a pretty fair chin, having been stopped only by Rahman and Audley Harrison. This is the kind of fight Dimitrenko needs at this stage of his blossoming career.

Fres Oquendo, USA/Puerto Rico (Last month #22) – No fights in 20 months. What happened?

Kirk Johnson, Canada – Last fought in June. He needs a couple of wins to be competitive in the rankings.

Owen Beck, Jamaica – He went 0-2 in 2005 after being touted as a hot prospect. He'll have to have a much better year in 2006 if he hopes to get to the top.

Kali Meehan, New Zealand – Nothing on the boards for the New Zealander. He put himself back in the win column in September but not against top competition. He may be on the European circuit in which case he could score numerous wins over one club fighter after another. In all candor, the club circuit is just where he belongs.

Sinan Samil Sam, Germany – While he doesn't qualify for a ranking here, he was, until his loss to Maskaeve, ranked number 1 by the WBC. Now he will likely drop off the face of the planet.