

Klitschko's The One

Written by Robert Ecksel
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In a move that came as little surprise to seasoned observers of the Eastern Bloc political scene, and even less of a surprise to [seasoned readers of The Sweet Science](#) , former heavyweight champion of the world Vitali Klitschko announced Saturday that he would run in Ukraine's parliamentary elections in March.

Since Klitschko's retirement from boxing last month, his heavyweight reign has been scrutinized by boxing historian and non-historian alike, and the general consensus is that it was [a dud](#)

. But no matter; Vitali Klitschko has bigger fish to fry. He has been wooed by several factions in the Ukraine and encouraged to throw his hat into the ring and run for political office. The former champ, in answer to this higher calling, has acquiesced and is actively campaigning.

Klitschko tops the list of a newly formed bloc that includes a party headed by the Ukraine's finance minister, who is also the former head of the Pora youth movement, which helped organize the mass protests that fueled last year's successful nonviolent (except for the Kremlin's dioxin poisoning of the opposition candidate) Orange Revolution.

Although his political career is just beginning, Klitschko refused to rule out an eventual bid for Kiev's mayoralty post. And, after that, if all goes well, the sky's the limit for Dr. K.

The 34-year-old Klitschko is hugely popular in the Ukraine. He was a prominent supporter of the Orange Revolution, which propelled Viktor Yushchenko to the presidency, and which advocated a clean sweep, a fresh start, an out with the old in with the new agenda.

Yushchenko's party tried to enlist Klitschko into its ranks, but the big man with the big punch and the big ambition had other ideas.

Unlike American elections, where we vote directly for candidates, Ukrainian voters cast ballots for a political party, and the party distributes seats to candidates based on its party list. Political parties in the Ukraine have been known to put high-profile names on their list to attract voters (called "Schwarzeneggering" in the U.S.), even though the person sometimes gives up the seat to someone else lower down, and less prominent, on the list.

Klitschko retired from boxing after a knee injury, hot on the heels of a back injury, forced him to pull out of an oft-delayed title defense against Hasim Rahman. The heavyweight picture, which was murky when Klitschko was active, is no less murky since his exit.

While Klitschko's long-term effect on the heavyweight division is still being debated, his effect on Ukrainian politics is already being felt.

Robert Ecksel is editor-in-chief of The Sweet Science. To [read more of his work](#) [Read more at the BLOG](#)