

Will the Heavyweights Become Irrelevant?

Written by Marc Lichtenfeld
Sunday, 02 April 2006 19:00

The mainstream media seems to notice boxing only when there is a dominant heavyweight champion, or at least a heavy king with a dominant personality.

After Sergei Liakhovich defeated Lamon Brewster Saturday night, not only was the heavyweight division turned upside down, but the infrastructure of boxing may have been as well.

Assuming that Wladimir Klitschko takes Chris Byrd's title later this month (a foregone conclusion because the fight is in Germany), if you include the WBO champ as a major world titlist (I don't because the WBO is one of the worst of the sanctioning bodies, but since some in the boxing media do, we'll include them in this argument), three of the four heavyweight champions are eastern European – Valuev from Russia, Klitschko from Ukraine/Germany and Liakhovich from Belarus.

With those three collectively holding 75% of the heavyweight championship, could the power structure and economics of the division leave the United States? I would imagine that bigger fights could be made in Kiev, St. Petersburg, Minsk and Munich than in Las Vegas. Considering that no heavyweight contenders have captured the hearts of U.S. boxing fans, there is probably more money to be made fighting in the former Soviet countries than there is at a casino in the States.

I believe that if Klitschko, Valuev and Liakhovich are able to hang on to their titles for a while (granted, a very big if), we will see more and more heavyweight title bouts outside of the United States.

But this may not be the death knell of the sport. As the United States continues to increase its Hispanic population, one could argue that the lower weight classes will hold more sway with boxing fans. I believe Hispanic fans care more about the likes of Morales, Barrera and Corrales than they do John Ruiz.

Secondly, the cruiserweight division is filled with skillful boxers who can bang. If fans are jonesing for big punchers and exciting fights, they only need to look at O'Neill Bell, Wayne Braithwaite, Guillermo Jones, Jean-Marc Mormeck, Felix Cora, Steve Cunningham and several others. Of course the cruiserweights don't have a fraction of the prestige of the heavyweights, but the action in that division could make people forget about the heavies for a while. Let's face it. The mainstream media barely covers boxing as it is. Boxing fans will gravitate towards where the most exciting fighters are. Fans will no longer shell out big bucks simply because a guy weighs over 200 pounds. With so many choices for their dollars, they demand quality fights. And if the heavies can't provide it, there will be another fight in a different division within a few weeks.

The latest developments have the potential to change the sport as we know it. The focus on the big boys in this country may change, while the global nature of the glamour division may attract

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a larger worldwide audience, which would be beneficial to boxing over the long term.

There's a Bob Dylan song that says, "The times they are a changin'." They just very well might be.

Jabs

This is my last column for TheSweetScience for a while. As you may know, I am hosting a new nationally syndicated radio show, Through the Ropes. The show can be heard on Thursday nights from 9 – 10 ET on the Sports Byline USA Broadcast Network, Sirius Satellite Radio Channel 122, American Forces Network and www.sportsbyline.com. The demands of the show require that I focus my energy in that direction right now.

I originally came to TheSweetScience because of the quality roster of writers that were already on the site. That list has only become more impressive over time. It is truly an honor to have my work associated with these fine fight scribes.

I want to thank Charles Jay, Chris Gielty and especially Robert Ecksel for their support and hard work. But I am most grateful to TheSweetScience readers who took the time out of their hectic days to read whatever it was that I was spouting off about. I have enjoyed your feedback and camaraderie and hope it will continue.

I sincerely hope that this is not goodbye but simply a see-you-soon.

As always – Obey my commands and protect yourself at all times.