

The Heavy Wait for a Champ to Remember

Written by Rick Folstad
Tuesday, 18 April 2006 19:00

If the heavyweight division was your wife, you'd sleep in another room.

It's not that the division doesn't still hold promise, it's just not very exciting right now.

Maybe that's because it's a weight class of mostly strangers, guys with a lot of letters in their names who speak with an accent and come from places we couldn't spell, pronounce or find on a map.

It used to be our division. Now it's the rest of the world's.

But maybe that's a good thing. With the division left in our hands, John Ruiz was a heavyweight champion.

Ruiz is a tough guy and everything, but watching him fight is about as exciting as watching ice melt. He didn't single-handedly beat down the division, but he was there long enough to get a couple good licks in.

Seventeen years ago, you could ask anyone on the street who the heavyweight champ of the world was. They'd tell you Mike Tyson.

Today, there are four champs and no one knows for sure who they are. Ask your barber or your insurance agent or even your wife to name three of the four heavyweight champions of the world. Good luck.

When that stumps them, ask for the names of two champions. Offer a little help, maybe drop a big hint or two.

Finally, just ask them to name one heavyweight champion. If they still struggle, give them a clue. Tell them he's the IBF champ and his name is Chris Buuuuur...C'mon, you can get it. Think of something that sings in trees and lays eggs. A woodpecker is a Still can't get it? Tweety Bird is what kind of an animal? A Bird? Chris Bird? Right. You've got it. It's just spelled a little different. Chris spells it Byrd.

Byrd's nickname is "Rapid Fire," which doesn't conjure up visions of a Marciano left hook or a Tyson uppercut. Carnage isn't in his fight plan. He can't pop a balloon, but he's got more moves than a roomful of future Bobby Fischers.

Byrd faces Wladimir Klitschko of the Ukraine on Saturday night in Germany (on HBO), which is apparently becoming the new Las Vegas.

Here's a little pop quiz on the rest of the heavyweight champions. As soon as you know the answer, raise your hand. Extra points will be given for the correct pronunciation.

The Heavy Wait for a Champ to Remember

Written by Rick Folstad
Tuesday, 18 April 2006 19:00

OK. Let's try the WBA champion. Hint: He's a Russian with the catchy nickname of "Beast from the East." Anyone want to make a guess? Any hands? He's a seven-footer, but don't try to spell his name without looking it up. Another hint: He beat Ruiz by a majority decision this past December to win the title. He's scheduled to fight 6-foot-1 Owen "What the Heck" Beck on June 3 in – you've got it – Germany.

Did I already call it the new Las Vegas?

Still don't know his name? Try Nikolay Valuev, who is 43-0 with 31 knockouts, though his list of victims doesn't ring a lot of bells.

All right, this one should be easy. He's the WBC champ.

Close your eyes and think of Lennox Lewis and making movies and huge upsets. No luck? How about the name "Rock?" Still nothing? All right. He holds the belt that used to belong to Vitali Klitschko, winning it by default when Klitschko retired last year because of injuries. He still held onto the belt last month when he fought to a draw against James "Lights Out" Toney. With a draw, the belt stays with the fighter who already has it, which means this guy still hasn't won the belt in the ring.

Give up?

Hasim Rahman.

But you knew that.

Finally, we come to the most intriguing fighter of the bunch. New to the "title belt crowd," he won the WBO championship earlier this month in Cleveland by defeating Lamon Brewster in a very good fight that showed signs of a heavyweight comeback.

His nickname is the "White Wolf" and he's from Belarus, which is probably close to Germany, considering that's the new Las Vegas, though I think I already mentioned that.

His name? Sergei Liakhovich.

You might want to write that name down in case some smart mouth asks you to name a heavyweight champion of the world. It's not as easy to pronounce as Chris Byrd or John Ruiz, but from what we've seen so far, Liakhovich might be an easier fighter to remember.