

You Can Bank On Calvin Brock

Written by Rick Folstad

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An American heavyweight contender with a college degree? That's like a truck driver with season tickets to the opera, a bouncer who moonlights as a concert pianist.

Contenders don't graduate from college. They grow up trying to fight their way out of the city's mean streets before they die of an overdose.

You know the story. Tough kid grows up in a bad neighborhood. Drug pushers on every street corner. Drops out of school at 14, joins a gang, steals a car, meets an understanding cop, takes up boxing and turns his life around.

That's not Calvin Brock, it's Mike Tyson.

Brock is the other guy, the rare contender with the four-year degree, the supportive parents and some promising options after boxing.

And it's not like Brock graduated with one of those mail order, fifty-dollar, study-at-home degrees in beach volleyball from Acme State.

Brock is legitimate. He earned a degree in finance from the University of North Carolina – Charlotte, which explains why he's been called The Boxing Banker.

It's a special thing to have a college degree. Brock might want to use it later on in life if the fight game doesn't work out quite like he hopes it will, like he expects it to. Both his parents have college degrees, so following their example made it a little easier when he was growing up.

But he's not into banking right now. He's into boxing, has been for most of his life. He says it's in his heart, that he started dreaming of someday turning pro when he was just eight years old.

That dream came true five years ago.

"I think the appeal was the one-on-one competition," Brock (28-0, 22 KOs) said on a recent conference call promoting his Saturday night fight with Timor Ibragimov (21-0-1, 13 KOs) at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas (HBO). "I like the preparation for boxing, the excitement, the tournaments, the traveling, the TV. I like everything about it."

Asked what he knows about Ibragimov, who is from Uzbekistan but fighting out of Florida, Brock said he's watched tapes of three of his fights.

"He's an outside boxer and I plan on getting him out of there by landing my shots," said Brock, who comes from Charlotte. "I am good at finding my opponent and landing my shots."

Along with having a degree, Brock is one of the few heavyweight contenders out there who has

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never struggled with his English.

Against Ibragimov, he'll be facing another talented heavyweight from the Eastern Bloc, a growing group of large, hardnosed fighters who are slowly taking over the heavyweight division.

"Most of the [American] athletes today are playing football, basketball and baseball," said Brock, when asked why most of today's heavyweight champs have names we can't spell or pronounce.

Asked the same question, Ibragimov said it was a very good thing for guys like him.

"Before, I was sure that the best heavyweight came from America," Ibragimov said. "Mike Tyson, Muhammad Ali, Larry Holmes, George Foreman. Now, the champions are coming from the former Soviet Union. Today, when you ask anybody who the best heavyweight is, they say [Wladimir] Klitschko or somebody else, but they never say an American. Before, yes. But no now."

Which separates Brock that much more from the rest of the contenders and champions. He's an educated American heavyweight with a good right hand and a name you don't stumble over.

"I am definitely going to make a statement [Saturday night]," he said. "And the world will be drooling for me to take on one of the world titleholders."

You can bank on it.