

I Nominate Wladimir Klitschko To Be The Emissary Of Boxing

Written by Michael Woods

Wednesday, 25 October 2006 19:00

He is the standout heavyweight in this timeframe, which couldn't even be termed a Silver Age, let alone a Golden Age, of the heavyweight division. Wladimir Klitschko has a ways to go before anyone starts talking about a plaque in Canastota, but I must confess that I am rooting for Dr. Steelhammer, the puncher with the PhD, to ascend above all the other heavyweights, conclusively, and be thought of as the man in the weight class.

Seeing Klitschko on Wednesday at his training camp at the Caesars facility in the Poconos of Pennsylvania, you had to be impressed with the man's confidence, humility and a major facet that impacted me, his attitude on philanthropy.

Klitschko, you see, will be donating a portion of his cut from his Nov. 11 fight with The Greatest American Heavyweight Hero, Calvin Brock, to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The brothers Klitschko visited the African nation of Namibia recently and were taken by the plight of the youth. AIDS is a vicious scourge on their society, and the boxer will do his part to aid the stricken culture with a formidable donation, by giving no less than \$250,000 to the UN effort for Namibia.

Reporters aren't supposed to root for one athlete over another. They are supposed to be impartial, and simply present the facts to the reader. A columnist has more leeway, but still, people expect the press to act not as cheerleaders, but as their unbiased eyes and ears. Sorry, I have to deviate from that desired state of impartiality. I must fully endorse Klitschko to ascend to the top of the heavyweight ladder, conclusively, because he shows such admirable characteristics.

I know, some of you might be scrolling up at this point, checking to see whose byline is attached to this piece.

Maybe I'm getting soft, after treating Joe Calzaghe so lovingly on Monday.

Not to worry, I still reserve the right to rip new orifices in deserved targets when the case calls for it.

But Klitschko, with his low-key confidence, and humility, and philanthropic leanings, would truly be a desirous choice as lead dog in the heavyweight pack. Wouldn't it be strange to have an emissary for the sport, one not known for scrapes with police, or drug use, or sex attacks, atop the premier division?

Wouldn't it be different to have somebody who wouldn't be doling out black eyes to the tattered visage of our weathered shared passion, the savage science, as our leading man?

It's not like Klitschko has gone soft on us, with all his talk of the UN and the children of Namibia.

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On Wednesday, he took questions from the press. Referring to the Soviet Bloc holding all the heavyweight straps, Wlad isn't in such a sharing mood.

"I have to grab all the belts," he said, acknowledging his brother Vitali's exit from active pugilistic duty. "I in no way underestimate Calvin Brock, he's a strong fighter. This is my time."

He continued his assessment of Brock, the undefeated Brawling Banker from North Carolina.

"He's very technical in the way he moves," said Klitschko, as trainer Emanuel Steward sat next to him and chimed in with occasional follow-ups. "He's got good basics and does a variety of things. He punches with both hands and he's a smart fighter."

The camp has been in effect for six weeks, and Klitschko has gotten most of his sparring from Steward's cruiserweight prospect/contender, Jonathan Banks, as well as Chazz Witherspoon, the undefeated Philly prospect.

"The weeks haven't been easy," he said. "There's a reason why. There are no distractions. It's the perfect place to be focused."

One writer touched on Klitschko's likeability factor, asking him about the upcoming reception in Madison Square Garden. Brock won't be the overwhelming fan fave, soaking up the chants of "USA, USA"; this flat world has erased some of our nationalistic tendencies, and people, just maybe, are more inclined to judge others on their actions, and not root for one athlete solely because of their nation of origin.

"I came to New York first eleven years ago," Klitschko, age 30, said. "I'm still excited about the city. New York is not the United States, New York is itself. There are so many different nationalities, it's amazing. With all the problems in the Middle East, New York is a great example of all nationalities living together. If they will accept me, I feel New York is my city."

See what I mean?

He has a different purpose than many (most?) athletes of our time. Not to say that many (most?) are dumb, or evil, but to get to the level of world-class athlete, it is necessary that an athlete have an excessive level of self-absorption. After all, they have to spend an inordinate amount of time honing their craft, and they are responding to an innate desire to rise above the masses. They have egos to match their ambitions and that ego on display, outside the context of self-improvement in their sport of choice, can be an ugly sight to behold. Klitschko talks about the role model that is New York as a blueprint for peace in the Middle East. He is different, and I haven't truly recognized his potential as a breakout, transcendent star in the sport until Wednesday.

Need more heart-tugging material?

Klitschko said he was most touched when, after pummeling Chris Byrd mercilessly in April enroute to a seventh round TKO, Byrd's young son came into the ring. The boy approached

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Wladimir, the boxer said, and hugged him. “‘You fought good,’ young Byrd said. ‘Keep the belt.’ He’s got a good spirit and a lot of courage to accept someone who beat his father. The genetics speaks for itself. The son has got the heart of his father.”

All right, I have to finish this up, before my rep erodes. If there are any nominations for a rep-repairing rip job to restore my cred, send ‘em in. But I stand by my discovery, and my assessment of Wladimir Klitschko, and will be rooting for him on Nov. 11. Nothing against Brock, who is a truly nice guy. Hey, if he wants to pony up a quarter mil of his purse for charity, I’ll flip a coin to determine my rooting interest. But boxing can always use a solid citizen to represent the sport, and in Wladimir Klitschko, we have one.