

Faith Or Folly: Can Chris Byrd Fly Again?

Written by Michael Woods
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Chris Byrd isn't shy about proclaiming his faith. While fighters stitch promotional logos and fearsome nicknames onto their trunks, Byrd has featured a favorite passage from the Scriptures, Acts 4:12, which announces to fight fans that "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

That faith has held Byrd in good stead since he was born again in 1993, but that certitude comes off differently when Byrd announces that he still feels like he can whup just about anyone in the heavyweight division.

The fighter, who headlines ESPN's Wednesday Night Fights broadcast against 40-year-old Paul Marinaccio on a card taking place in the Bahamas, hasn't won a fight in convincing fashion since 2002. And that win came against Evander Holyfield, during the onset of the Real Deal's lowest ebb, in December 2002.

In his last outing, a year ago, Byrd's performance could've been a catalyst to call it a day, and exit this most dangerous game at a wise juncture.

Wladimir Klitschko had his way with Byrd (39-3-1, 20 knocks), and savaged the 36-year-old Michigan native.

His previous outing, against DaVarryl Williamson in October 2005, was even less stellar. The two fighters showed zero pep and fire between them, and the bout was one of the very worst of the year between two notable names.

One year earlier, Byrd showed considerable pluck in facing off with a fighter with a similar level of pop, Jameel McCline (270 pounds), who, as usual, was the far larger man in the ring. Heck, with Byrd (214 on that night), often the ref is bulkier than him.

The undersized heavy notched a draw against Andrew Golota in April 2004, and before that, not everyone agreed with the judges who saw Byrd beating Fres Oquendo in September 2003.

So, when you examine the recent record, Byrd's proclamations of faith that he can again be a player in the heavyweight division come off looking a bit more like delusion than anything else. But, remember who that last conclusive win came against? Holyfield. And everyone, you, me, your grandma who doesn't know a left hook from a fish hook, didn't think Holyfield had a snowball's chance in hell of being a player in the division (even in this "Bronze Era" of heavyweight prizefighting) when he started his comeback last August.

And the possibility of Holyfield contesting somebody for a crown this summer doesn't seem so daffy anymore.

Maybe Byrd, the former WBO and IBF heavyweight titlist, has a similar reclamation arc in him.

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What do you say, readers?

Should Byrd accept fight fans' ample claps on the back for being a plucky guppy in an ocean full of hammerhead sharks, and hang up the gloves? Should he perhaps consider a drop down to cruiserweight, or will his faith carry him to another run, and another title shot?

UPDATE Byrd (40-3-1, 21 KOs) had his way with hobbyist/pugilist Paul Marinaccio on Wednesday Night Fights, forcing the 40-year-old construction boss to quit on his stool after the sixth round. The 36-year-old Byrd looked less than thrilled when he saw Marinaccio say 'no mas.' The loser, now 22-3-2, cited an injured right arm as his reason for being unable to continue. The official verdict was TKO :01 in the seventh.

Not sure if this outing, against a foe who fought with the intensity and snarliness of a sparring partner, will embolden Byrd on his quest to perhaps make a final run, and then quit the sport on his terms. It shouldn't. But Byrd's family was present, and the weather in the Bahamas looked pleasant, so there was some upside to consider.