

Salvaging The Behemoths

Written by Phil Woolever
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It's going to take more than just a flicker of Evander Holyfield's lost glory to return a spark to the heavyweight division, especially in the USA.

Something like a trail to an elephant's graveyard may explain the migration of vital, vente` vagabond XXL sluggers from North America to European and former Soviet bloc rumbling regions.

A few heads may turn when Wladimir Klitschko re-engages with Lamon Brewster, but the impact marketwise will be limited nonetheless.

With the rematch of a raucous brawl won by Brewster, heavyweights will gain a slight spotlight, but it will take many more such scenes to regain lost momentum in the sport's previous glamour ground.

Klitschko – Brewster is in Cologne, Germany, distant from the days of squared off Big Apple Garden parties or Atlantic City boardwalk thrills. Maybe for the 220 plus pounds club nowadays, the gold lies in hills outside the US, at least until the next breakout North American star, nowhere to be found on any realistic horizon at this point, arrives.

It won't make difference if older Klitschko brother Vitali actually carries out his comeback plan either.

Why?

Mayweather. Pacquaio. Cotto. Hatton.

Add up many a quartet of popular headliners and it's not much more than what the combined poundage will be when Klitschko and Brewster meet again.

What's a couple hundred pounds between pay per view pals?

The heaviest monikers of boxing's current era weigh in at way less than their more massive colleagues from the upper weight divisions.

In terms of bang for the buck (or pop for the paid subscription) present-day heavies are hardly where they were at the end of the Lewis – Holyfield-ruled turn of the century, which wasn't as stirring as the Holyfield- Mike Tyson-Riddick Bowe era of the early to mid 1990s, which probably didn't have as strong a top twenty as the Larry Holmes '80s era.

Since the new millennium, a general lack of consistent fanfare droned a dirge that coincided with Tyson's decline, but overall the sport hasn't seemed to suffer as much as he has.

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Maybe the old saying about the sport going the way of its flagship division has proven true once again, as other combat sports increase their market shares.

It's been years since heavyweight boxers have maintained top billing and popularity.

Luckily, there have always been enough excellent fighters below the middleweight limit to keep the fistic fleet on course, even during those times when the bigger ships appear to be sinking.

There was far more buzz around boxing heading into the Miguel Cotto versus Zab Judah or Ricky Hatton-Jose Luis Castillo bout than there was leading up to the recent Sultan Ibragimov - Shannon Briggs bout.

The big boys represented hard and traded leather, but in terms of style points the Cotto Judah affair or Hatton's blowout of Castillo dwarfed any recent heavyweight match as the prestige event.

Subscriber tallies for Ibragimov-Briggs weren't available, but it's safe to say the numbers for Cotto-Judah were much stronger.

Heavyweights are absent from the pound for pound list and the fan's attention.

A pair of fighters who've both been retired for many fistic moons loom larger than most active heavies.

Lennox Lewis (who says he wants no part of it) and Vitali Klitschko remain the hottest potential pairing since their celebrated duel. In the years since then none of the other big boys has really stepped up to brighten a barren scenario.

Wladimir Klitschko is generally recognized as what cream there is in the crop today. Simon Peter and a revolving door of little internationally known eastern Europeans provide cheap thrills.

Overseas acquaintances have definitely managed to dominate the best the US presently offers, but that's not saying so much.

From a global perspective, the only thing that should matter is finding the best king sized boxer on the planet. While absolute verification of that status will remain vastly difficult, there is already a path in place to jump-start the necessary healing process immediately. That's still years, perhaps decades, too late already.

Doing it would be simple except for convincing some powers at be to forget safe money.

Other than that there's no big revelation needed.

The simple plan is historically proven but still vastly underused. Just make sure the currently scheduled, so-called title tilts come off.

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Match the winners. Not any more complicated than it was in the Golden Age.

Oleg Maskaev and Samuel Peter are set to square off Sept. 29.

After beating Briggs, Ibragimov has signed to unify alphabelts in October with Ruslan Chagaev, who conquered Nikolai Valuev.

So far so good, if we can count on those fights happening on schedule. A 30-day forfeit rule might keep things moving.

The winner of Ibragimov-Chagaev gets the winner of Klitschko-Brewster II. That winner gets a well-deserved, and longtime traditional soft defense if so desired, but they have to sign to meet the winner of Maskaev-Peter within 90 days after the previous eliminator.

There's your champ. The odds are only about 1,000 to 1 it will happen.

For now Vitali Klitschko is out of the mix. The odds of him getting injured in training are just too high and there's no more time to waste. That is unless Lewis does VK a huge favor and comes back too. Anybody who wanted to recognize that winner as the champ gets no argument here.

In the mean time, Bernard Hopkins and Winky Wright will get the summer spotlight. Many fine showdowns under the welterweight limit, like Rafael Marquez-Isreal Vasquez II are already signed.

Marketing juggernaut Manny Pacquiao's rematch with Marco Antonio Barrera is set for October. Mayweather, Hatton, and Oscar de la Hoya still have plans to announce.

News flash. Another year will pass with lackluster heavyweight developments.

Hopefully the big boys will stay in the swing of things and follow the outline for big winners to meet each other quickly. It could only take a couple years to return to the forefront, a couple put up or shut up pairings away from center ring stage.

That's a half-full glass situation.

If not, another half a decade could pass with only a handful of meaningful heavyweight happenings.

And if the dinosaurs continue to sink in self made quicksand, some of the other guys might sadly get pulled along.