

Samuel Peter Vows To Destroy Stand-In McCline

Written by Robert Mladinich
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Although a lot of people might question his legitimacy as a belt holder, none of the criticism should be leveled at newly crowned WBC interim heavyweight champion Samuel “The Nigerian Nightmare” Peter.

The hard-punching Nigerian who lives and fights out of Las Vegas has played by the rules since turning pro in 2001, one year after he represented his native country at the Olympic Games in Sydney, Australia.

In a September 2005 IBF elimination bout, he knocked Wladimir Klitschko down numerous times but still lost a unanimous decision. Klitschko now holds that title.

A year later, Peter beat James Toney by decision in a WBC eliminator. Presumably that victory all but assured him a title fight.

For inexplicable reasons, another elimination bout was ordered with Toney. Peter beat Toney again by decision, this time even more impressively. Everything looked in order for him to finally get his hard-earned title shot against Oleg Maskaev, who had beaten Hasim Rahman for the crown.

However, Maskaev’s people had other plans and wanted him to fight fellow Russian Vitali Klitschko, a former champion, for considerably more money than he would have made against Peter.

The WBC named Vitali, who had retired because of recurring physical injuries, “champion emeritus” and that fight was on. Smarter heads prevailed, however, and that fight was nixed.

Vitali had then accepted a late September bout against Jameel “Big Time” McCline in Germany, while the Peter-Maskaev fight was scheduled for October 6 at Madison Square Garden.

McCline, a New York native who now lives in Florida, was scheduled to be on the MSG undercard against DaVarryl Williamson.

Within the space of a few weeks, both Vitali Klitschko and Maskaev pulled out of their fights with injuries. Peter was afraid he would once again find himself on the outside looking in of the title picture.

For a guy who has never done anything but fight hard and honestly, it was difficult for him to accept.

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Things finally went his way when promoter Don King salvaged the MSG show by matching him against the 37-year-old McCline, 38-7-3 (23 KOS), after the WBC named Peter the interim champion. As soon as Maskaev is healthy, he will have the first crack at retrieving his title.

“It doesn’t matter who I fight,” said the 27-year-old Peter, who boasts a 28-1 (22 KOS) record. “McCline is a good fighter, but it doesn’t matter. I am the champion, and I’ll do whatever it takes to defend my title.”

Although all of the heavyweight crowns are watered down these days, it is hard to fault Peter for being so happy to own one of them. With his bone-crunching power and willingness to fight anyone, he might just bring some excitement to the moribund division.

Although promoter King is known for his hyperbole, he says that Peter is the only heavyweight capable of bringing Mike Tyson-like energy to what many now consider boxing’s weakest division.

It is unlikely that Peter will have much trouble with McCline, even though at 6’6” tall challenger is six inches taller than Peter and three inches taller than Maskaev, who Peter had spent so much time preparing for.

Listening to Peter at one of his final public workouts, it is obvious that he agrees with that assessment. “I will knock out McCline quick,” he asserted in heavily accented English. “That’s what I see. McCline does not have a chance against me, but he is a good fighter, a tough opponent.”

A few weeks ago McCline was extremely disappointed over the fact that his fight with Vitali Klitschko had been scrapped. But boxing being boxing, especially in the heavyweight division, another door opened as quickly as the first one closed.

“It’s crazy but that’s why you’ve got to be ready for anything in boxing,” said the always amiable McCline, a seemingly rehabilitated ex-convict who in the early nineties served time in New York for possession of stolen property and promoting prison contraband.

“I was in against Vitali, then Vitali was out. I was in against Williamson, and now I’m fighting for the world heavyweight championship against Samuel Peter.”

Moreover, added McCline, “I’m a big, strong and talented heavyweight that can stand up and punch with Peter. This isn’t the first time I’ve been in the ring with a world champion. I’m coming to win.”

McCline has beaten Shannon Briggs by decision. However he was stopped in ten rounds by Wladimir Klitschko in a December 2002 WBO title fight, and also lost a decision to then IBF titlist Chris Byrd in November 2004 after having Byrd down in the second round.

In his last fight, a third round TKO loss to then WBA champion Nikolay Valuev in Switzerland in January 2007, McCline was felled by a debilitating knee injury, not a punch by the seven-foot

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giant.

If nothing else, McCline, always a realist, knows that this is quite possibly his last opportunity to resurrect his up-and-down career.

Peter is also a realist and believes that regardless of how hungry McCline or any other heavyweight is, they are not going to beat him. He has worked too hard and waited too long for this opportunity to let it slip away.

“Tick, tick, tick,” he assailed. “The clock is ticking on all heavyweights who don’t want to fight. I’m a real fighter. I could have waited to face Maskaev to protect my title. But I want to fight (because) that is what champions do.”

If Peter is successful against McCline, next up is Maskaev assuming he is healthy. Should Peter beat the iron-willed Russian, he would then like nothing more than a rematch against Wladimir Klitschko. He still bristles over the outcome of their first encounter.

“If I can fight anyone, it would be Wladimir Klitschko,” he said. “If he stands up after I knock him down this time, I will retire him. I don’t have a problem fighting anyone. Even if the devil comes up and wants to fight, I’m ready.”

The pick here is Peter by seventh round TKO. As he always does, McCline will come to fight, but Peter has worked too hard and been screwed too many times to relinquish his title. His ferocity and busy offensive style will not give McCline the ability to breathe, much less win.

The Peter-McCline title fight will be televised on Showtime at 10:00 p.m. EST. Non-televised bouts on the card include former two division champion Jose Antonio Rivera, 38-5-1 (24 KOS), of Worcester, Massachusetts, vs. Daniel Santos, 30-3-1 (21 KOS), of Puerto Rico in an elimination bout to determine the number one WBA super welterweight ranking.

Heavyweights Kevin “The Clones Colossus” McBride, 34-5-1 (29 KOS), the Irishman who retired Mike Tyson, will battle Andrew Golota, 39-6-1 (32 KOS), of Poland; and DaVarryl Williamson, 24-4 (20 KOS), of Denver goes against Australian Kali Meehan, 32-3 (26 KOS).

The card is being promoted by Don King Productions, in association with Duva Boxing and MSG.