

Chambers Lets Winnable Fight Slip Away

Written by Michael Woods

Saturday, 26 January 2008 19:00

I hesitate to take the inventory of a man who steps into the ring, for anyone who does that deserves high praise, as long as they are giving it their all. Unfortunately, the case of Eddie Chambers forces me to be a bit more pointed in my critique than I might like.

But after seeing Chambers, on the cusp of earning a heavyweight title shot against Wladimir Klitschko, throw away an early lead, refuse to fight with an ounce of passion or urgency for long stretches, and throw a paltry 16 punches in the twelfth and final round of a title-shot elimination match against Alexander Povetkin in Berlin, Germany, I cannot dial back my disappointment.

Perhaps Chambers has a viable excuse for his showing, but even a world-class explanation would be moot when that contract to fight Klitschko is handed to Povetkin, who took a unanimous decision on Saturday in Germany, and will hand tight while Klitschko meets up with heavy underdog Sultan Ibragimov next month in New York.

The scores read 117-111, 119-109, and 116-112 for the 2004 Olympic super heavyweight gold medallist, Povetkin.

I suspect this outing will haunt Chambers for the rest of his life, because based on talent alone, he should have been the one exiting Germany with the title shot. He has a snappy jab, and showed in the first few rounds that he has acceptable pop, even if it isn't top-tier. At the end of the fight, though, I found myself comparing Chambers to Dominick Guinn, who perpetually underperformed, then overpromised, then underperformed again.

This is Chambers' second straight outing where he faded down the stretch and essentially gave the judges every excuse to give the fight to the other guy.

Is he afraid of success? That armchair psych assessment leaps out at me, because had he kept on doing what he was doing early, Chambers would be talked about as a legitimate American heavyweight hopeful. Maybe that could still come to pass. But I fear that we need only look at Guinn's career arc, if we want to predict Chambers'. I hope I am wrong, I really do, because as a fight fan who is eager for heavyweight talent to emerge, I really did think Edie Chambers had a shot at stepping up. Sorry to use the past tense, I really don't want to come down to hard, but that man has promise, and I fear some mental block will keep him from realizing it.

The 25-year-old Chambers came in with a 30-0 (16 KOs) mark, while the 28-year-old Povetkin came in with a 14-0 (11 KOs) record.

Both men had a win over once credible, but faded vets, to their credit in this IBF title shot eliminator. Chambers took down Cal Brock in his last dance, while Povetkin showed Chris Byrd that some younger guns are on the scene and to be reckoned with.

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Here's the round by round breakdown, in reverse order.

In the twelfth round, Chambers again looked like he was the up 'n comer in the champ's training camp, giving the champ some rounds. His gloves protecting his face, instead of being launched with the intent of inflicting hurt, Chambers spent the last round of the biggest fight of his life looking like he was getting in some easy sparring work.

In the eleventh round, Chambers, who'd been told in between rounds that he needed a kayo, infuriatingly held back. Meanwhile, Povetkin piled up the hits. There would have to be a reaaaally strong excuse for Chambers to explain the lack of urgency he showed in the second to last round, especially after his corner gave him the business. I cringed as I listened in to his corner after this round. HBO, strangely, focused on the lamer corner for the first half of the break, and then went back to the Povetkin corner for the last 15 seconds! Chambers' corner demanded a KO, or KO effort, once again.

In the tenth round, read the review of the previous five or so rounds. Povetkin, the cruder, and slower-handed of the two fighters, gave notice that he desired a win more than Chambers.

In the ninth round, Chambers drew applause with a four punch combo. But then Chambers, gloves drawn tight to his head in defensive posture, went back into the shell for too much of the round. Message sent by Chambers: the other guy wants it more than I do.

In the eighth round, it was more of the same sad story, if you are a Chambers fan. Povetkin piled up punches, throwing multiple one-twos. Perhaps Chambers was waiting for Povetkin to tire, to get winded, drop his hands, and provide a juicier target. Chambers did end the round with a sneaky counter right to the chin. Chambers landed 60% of his tosses in the round, a superb margin, but he threw far fewer launches and thus, told the judges that he wanted it less. Right or wrong that's how the game works, most of the time.

In the seventh, the Russian landed a right that wowed the crowd but it didn't phase Chambers. Neither did it wake him up, and return him to his early-round state.

In the sixth, Povetkin looked stronger, as he perhaps felt comfortable that Chambers' best hadn't hurt him horribly. Chambers also reverted to his worst habit, which was being a fighter who waited, waited, waited for a perfect spot, instead of pressing the action, piling up his quick jabs, and setting the tone. Would he perk up, stop acting like he was getting some sparring in, and realize the opportunity at hand? Or would he channel Dominick Guinn, and disappoint his corner, and his fans, with a weak work rate?

In the fifth, Povetkin showed more urgency early, but he looked a bit worried about counters, and that kept him from piling doubles into triple and quad shot combos.

The punchstat numbers said Chambers had the edge but I thought the Russian was busier, and Chambers let off the pedal. His corner gave him the business after, too, so I feel comfortable with my assessment. Sometimes stats, especially subjective ones, like punch counts, aren't the be all, end all.

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A counter right in close started off the fourth, and Chambers spent most of the round up in the Russian's grill. If I were his trainer, I'd have told him to keep more distance, use his feet more, but then he dropped a right-left combo that reminded me why I tap the keyboard.

In the third, swelling that began in the second worsened, as Chambers' right found its mark several times on Povetkin's left eye. Chambers looked to be taking over somewhat, as he was slipping smartly and confidently, lessening the sting by moving his head just enough. If he had heavier hands, with the clean shots he landed, the Russian would've been on the mat. But if he had heavier hands, he would've already been in with Wladimir Klitschko.

In the second round, Chambers took the round with a sharp right, which jolted the crowd out of its lethargy. Til that point, with 20 seconds to go, it was a close round. Both men were reasonably active, picked their shots wisely, and looked evenly match. But that right, that came after he tossed a jab, feinted with another, and unloaded, took the round.

In the first round, Chambers showed he meant business, as he snapped off some meaningful tosses from minute one. Off the bat, neither man's physique sent out a positive message, and neither man will make the cover of Men's Health. Povetkin closed the gap with some punches landed in close, after Chambers had scored nicely with body work.

SPEEDBAG Not sure what was going on, but the production on the show wasn't up to par at several points. The action lingered on too-tight shots for too long, and viewers weren't able to decipher what was happening.

--Punchstats showed Povetkin an edge in throws (929-398) and hits (201-197). Chambers landed an amazing 49% of his shots. When he threw he landed. The question begs: why didn't he throw more? Let's not forget to offer the Russian ample praise--he warded off an early storm, stayed cool, stayed strong til the end, and threw like a maniac.

--Lennox thinks Chambers can still make some noise in the division. Max thinks he should go to cruiser. What do you think, TSS Universe? Can Chambers go back to the drawing board, and remake himself into a busier fighter? Or can a fighter not learn a killer instinct, and a nose for closing the show. Let's hear from some of you ex fighters out there, please.