

Where's The Buzz For Klitschko/Ibragimov?

Written by Michael Woods

Thursday, 21 February 2008 19:00

The buzz surrounding Saturday's Wladimir Klitschko/Sultan Ibragimov scrap at Madison Square Garden is somewhere in between a bingo game at a senior citizen's home in Florida, and the lame-O atmosphere that dragged down Pavlik/Taylor II in Vegas last week.

The volume of mail and comments coming in to the TSS mailbox is underwhelming as well, as more folks are interested in discussing the merits of Money Mayweather and Sugar Ray Robinson on all-time pound for pound lists, rather than if and how the undersized Sultan can manage to take down Goliath Klitschko in this heavyweight consolidation match.

I have a couple theories why this IBF/WBO consolidation match isn't getting fight fans jazzed up like it should.

1) As a public persona, Wlad's personality isn't really fit for these times, for this generation of voyeurs who revel in reality TV. Mind you, I'm a fan of his gentlemanly style, his respectfulness to his foes and to the sport, and his superlative philanthropic work. But for these times, in which the bar has been raised in language explicitness, the classy Klitschko sometimes gets lost in the shuffle. He doesn't make headlines outside the ring, with dire threats to dispatch foes with Dragonian coldness, or cocky calls promising to rule the division until the end of Obama's second term. He doesn't stir the pot, and in a heavyweight era that is less than scintillating, the pot must be stirred, because the matchups themselves don't make anyone's mouth water. People who know him swear that Wlad can toss off bombs with the best of them; it would serve him well to unleash that side of his personality, and break away from his tightly scripted persona of gentleman/sportsman. Like it or not, our society and culture awards brashness and cockiness, and Wlad must get in step with this certainty if he wants to elevate his legacy and relevance. I'm not saying he should descend to Hopkins style posturing, and play a race card, or ask his foe if he's willing to die. But a little colorful hype, a little WWE style promo play, that could help raise his visibility.

2) Nobody really cares about unification, or consolidation, or whatever this belt collection business is called. Fight fans, fed by the mountains of Net-based fight coverage, have smartened up 1000% from the old days, when info on wasn't as readily available. Back in the day, a promoter and sanctioning body could get away with foisting a less than worthy contender on the public. Now, with boxrec on the scene, any fight fan can immediately determine that Mr. No. 1 Contender is a joke, with a record padded with more collagen and silicon, and smoothed out with more Botox than your average Hollywood hottie. Thus, the belts have become less important than ever before. You fight fans are a savvy bunch. You do your homework, and you know who is worthy, and who is a product of hype and politicking. Fewer and fewer people care about the belts, be they manufactured by the WBC, IBF, or Ring magazine. Bottom line, it's the matchup that matters. Sultan is a decent fighter, smart and sneaky, but we're talking about a risk averse technician who didn't feel confident enough in his skills to put away the ancient Evander Holyfield. Fight fans aren't pumped up to see him, another classy, anti-trash talker, by the way, and thus, the buzz for Klitschko/Ibragimov is what it is.

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3) Perhaps the one heavyweight matchup that could generate the sort of buzz that we became accustomed to, and now miss, is a Klitschko vs. Klitschko faceoff. I mean, what else gets you fired up, and ready to go? Klitschko vs. Maskayev, two polite gentlemen with suspect chins? Klitschko vs. Peter? Been there, done that, and Peter has backslid since that tussle. Chris Arreola get you jacked up? Alex Povetkin strike you as a division savior? Wlad against Vitali is just about the only heavyweight scrap I can mentally matchmake, and truly believe deserves to be on Pay Per View. The athletes and personalities simply aren't present in the heavyweight division to generate excitement, and sadly, I don't see anything or anyone on the horizon to change that. Unless Manny Steward and Wlad just get so sick of being undervalued, and say heck with it. "Bring it on, Vitali," I'd love to hear Wladimir say, as he calls out Vitali for an intra-family faceoff. "You're my big brother, but I'm gonna show you that little brother is the baddest ass in the family, and send you to the sidelines once and for all. I'll show mamma Klitschko who the family's fiercest fighter is!" That, I'd pay for. That would stir the pot, and get some buzz flowing.

*photo by Meghan Sinclair