

Could Pavlik Take Hagler? Arum Thinks Yes

Written by Ron Borges

Wednesday, 11 June 2008 19:00

Bob Arum was relaxing over a pile of onion rings at Johnny Rocket's on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City late Saturday night when he looked at an old friend across the table and asked a shocking question.

"How do you think Marvin would have done against Kelly?" the Hall of Fame promoter said.

It was late and the Kelly in question, WBC/WBO middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik, had only hours earlier masterfully destroyed a journeyman named Gary Lockett inside three rounds at Boardwalk Hall in his first defense of the title he'd won by knocking out Jermain Taylor last year, so perhaps Arum could be excused such an excess. The hour was late and euphoria was high. Combine those things with a pile of onion rings and it can cloud a man's judgment.

The Marvin in question was Marvelous Marvin Hagler, who is universally regarded as among the two or three greatest middleweight champions of all-time. When Arum was told this was a question that might signal early onset of Alzheimer's, he laughed. He then said, "I think he'd beat Marvin."

Now a promoter's job is bombast and its first prerequisite is unbridled optimism but even by those standards it seemed, well, ridiculous. Hagler was a guy who was never hurt by anyone he ever fought, although he was not as kind to most of his opponents. So if Pavlik couldn't hurt him, what would happen after that?

It seemed obvious but if one forgets, go ask Thomas Hearn. Yet such is the state of emotion presently surrounding Pavlik, who is quickly becoming one of the most popular fighters in America by virtue of his knockout power and a personality that is both engaging and down to earth in that Midwest kind of way you learn growing up in a place like Youngstown, Ohio.

You can't really dislike Kelly Pavlik if you were paid to and you have to admire the way he handled the utterly outgunned Lockett so professionally. You also have to like the fact that everywhere he went in Atlantic City people seemed to know who he was and wanted to get close to him.

That doesn't make him Marvin Hagler or Carlos Monzon, regardless of what their former promoter now says, but he doesn't have to be Hagler to be plenty good enough to help continue what has been a revival of boxing over the past 18 months. Pavlik has been a big part of it because during that time period he has knocked out two leading contenders (Jose Luis Zertuche and Edison Miranda) as well as Taylor and Lockett and also beat Taylor in a rematch at a catch weight of 164 pounds. People notice such things. Frankly, it doesn't hurt that he's white, either, and he knows it.

Once he was dismissed because of his pigmentation, laughed off as a figment of Arum's imagination, the adroit matchmaking of Bruce Trampler and his manager, Cameron Dunkin, and

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a guy who would be exposed by Taylor if Miranda didn't get to him first. Well, they both got to him and they both left on their backs. Do that for a while, fight after fight, and people begin to notice.

But for Arum to mention Pavlik's name in the same breath as Monzon and Hagler's takes the whole discussion to another level. For his part, Pavlik (34-0, 30 KO) came out of the Lockett fight saying he was ready to fight anyone. He twice mentioned Godzilla as one possibility so to say his confidence is high at the moment would be an understatement. The question for Arum is where can he logically take Pavlik next.

Immediately after the fight there was much discussion of a possible Oct. 18 match with super middleweight and light heavyweight champion Joe Calzaghe back in Atlantic City, New York, Las Vegas or Wales. Calzaghe's promoter, Frank Warren, was in town and an initial discussion was undertaken but the fact is Calzaghe would rather face Roy Jones, Jr., an aging legend he believes would add more credibility to his own growing resume.

"My first priority is Joe Calzaghe and that's a huge fight," Arum said. "If that fight takes place it would take place in Las Vegas. So that's priority No. 1. I really believe the Calzaghe people want to make the fight. I think the economics will come together and the fight will be made.

"Now if it can't be made, then Kelly would fight in September and we'd like it to be in Ohio."

Originally Arum hoped to put such a fight in the stadium the Cleveland Browns play in but logistical problems have eliminated that possibility. He could yet take such a fight indoors to the Cavaliers' arena with an opponent like Marco Antonio Rubio (42-4-1, 37 KO), who is Arum's leading backup candidate if a Calzaghe fight cannot be put together.

Still, Arum's preference was clear.

"If we can get Calzaghe done that's going to dwarf anything you see now," Arum said. "That's going to be a monster."

Both are undefeated and wildly popular in their countries and would do a big number on pay-per-view in the States and in the UK. The problem is Calzaghe really doesn't need a young gun like Pavlik in his face at this stage of his career.

At 36, the undefeated Calzaghe has made clear he only wants two or three more fights, all of them for big money. Squaring off with someone 10 years younger who is a powerful puncher would fulfill those requirements but so would Jones, who at 39 is far less formidable than a youthful middleweight knockout artist on the make.

"We'd love to fight Joe Calzaghe," said Jack Loew, Pavlik's brash trainer. "Kelly will fight anyone they put in front of him. If he stays at middleweight, he stays at middleweight. I think Calzaghe is the only fight that we would leave middleweight for now. Calzaghe catches a lot of right hands. Bernard Hopkins put him on his ass and I think if Kelly catches him on the chin he won't have a chance."

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Pavlik is not without options beyond Calzaghe however. While Rubio is the leading candidate for the fall, Pavlik himself spoke of wanting to unify the titles, which would mean taking a run at either IBF champion Arthur Abraham or WBA title holder Felix Sturm. Both would have little leverage beyond the belts they wear so Pavlik would be assured of a significant payday and control of most areas of the promotion with either champion.

In the end, Joe Calzaghe will decide whether or not he fights Pavlik while Pavlik will decide everything else. It would seem his options are many and all good ones...unless Bob Arum decides he really would like to see how Marvin would have done with Kelly.