In the weeks leading up to Shaun George's bout against former heavyweight champion Chris Byrd on May 16 in Las Vegas, George felt like the invisible man.

Just about all of the pre-fight hoopla, including promos by ESPN 2, which televised the bout, had to do with the fact that Byrd had shed 40 pounds to go down two weight divisions to finish off his career.

He also had a well-muscled and seemingly strong and sturdy body to show for all of his hard work.

The smart money said that Byrd would easily defeat George, and then tear through the light heavyweight division. It was in that division that most people believed the overachieving Byrd should have spent most of his career.

The 29-year-old George, a resident of Brooklyn, New York, refused to believe the hype. Working behind a solid jab and sizzling right hands, he dropped Byrd in the second round and two more times in the ninth before referee Jay Nady finally stopped the one-sided battering at 2:42 of that round.

"He took me to school," said the always refreshingly candid 37-year-old Byrd, now 40-5-1 (21 KOS).

Byrd, who earned a silver medal in the 165 pound division at the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, later collapsed in his dressing room and had to be taken to the hospital. It was determined that he passed out from a bad reaction to prescription pain killers that he had been administered for an injury to his right shoulder.

After being released from the hospital with a clean bill of health, Byrd's wife announced in no uncertain terms that her husband's boxing career was over.

"Everyone underestimated me," said the extremely engaging and bright George, who is also a certified paralegal. "Before the fight, it was all about Chris Byrd. ESPN didn't recognize me until the day of the fight. I knew I had to go in and dominate. Chris is a sneaky guy who knows how to steal rounds. I didn't want to leave it up to the judges."

After toiling in relative anonymity since turning professional in 2000, George, now 17-2-2 (8 KOS), finally looks like he has a golden future.

When this fight was announced, George knew right away this was the opportunity he had been waiting for for years. He went to camp for the first time in his career, spending six weeks sparring with Antonio Tarver in Florida and several weeks working with Vassiliy Jirov in Phoenix.

He couldn't have gotten better preparation for the southpaw Byrd, who knew every trick in the book – and then some.

"Tarver is a slick southpaw and Jirov is a real aggressive southpaw," said George. "Jirov isn't just aggressive, he's super aggressive and Tarver's defense is real tight. I'm a very studious person, so working with those guys was like going to school. I knew I would beat Byrd as soon as the fight was signed."

While many people now view George as an overnight sensation, he doesn't see himself that way at all.

"I've been a pro for eight years," he explained. "I've just been flying under the radar. I had some injuries, and it wasn't always easy to get the right fights."

Two of the wrong fights he got were against then undefeated Matt Godfrey, who shockingly stopped him in the first round in May 2006, and Alexander Gurov, to whom George lost a unanimous 12 round decision in Gurov's home country of Russia in February 2007.

His biggest wins were decisions over Chad Van Sickle, who was 20-1-2, and Richard Hall, who despite a 27-6 record at the time is known for giving everyone he gets in the ring with fits.

"After the Richard Hall fight, I got really motivated," said George. "I wanted all the top guys. I was supposed to fight Eric Harding at one point, but he pulled out. When I got the opportunity to fight Byrd, I knew it was right for me."

George wasn't the least bit worried about Byrd's style, which is completely unpredictable. "I can fight any style," he said. "People underestimate my boxing abilities and my punching power. I haven't stopped everyone I fought, but I hurt just about everyone I fought."

Georges's trainer, Tommy Brooks, who is also his brother-in-law, told him that if he ever got Byrd hurt, he couldn't let him off the hook. Byrd was much too cagey and savvy a veteran to give a second or a third chance to.

"He told me not to go crazy, but to stay on him at all times," said George. "He knows I'm still a work in progress. I feel like the Byrd fight made me a better fighter, and my future fights will make me even better than I am now. I'm real excited right now. Good things are going to happen."

One thing George refuses to do is dwell on the past, especially the loss to Godfrey which he says was a fluke. The defeat to Gurov he describes as an outright robbery.

Now that he's beaten Byrd, there will be no more flying under the radar for George.

"It's like I've got a bull's eye on my chest," he explained. "There is no better fight out there for me now than against Glen Johnson. Byrd talked about fighting Johnson if he got past me. He didn't, so a fight between Johnson and me only makes sense. It's a great TV fight."

Another fight George would like would be against Joe Calzaghe. Even more interesting is the fact that George would like nothing better than to travel to Wales and fight Calzaghe before 60,000 of his diehard fans.

“That is my dream, to fight a great champion like Joe in front of such a hostile crowd,” said George. “It would make the victory so much more meaningful.”

Also in George’s immediate future is the impending birth of his first child, a boy, who is due in September. George has been married to Casey Duva, of the fabled Duva clan, for three years. With the baby on the way, and Byrd out of his way, George is starting to believe that all of the pieces of his personal puzzle are finally falling into place.

“I’ve always been motivated, but with my baby on the way I’m even extra motivated,” said George. “This is going to be a very good year for me. Prior to beating Byrd, nobody knew my name. That is all about to change. Next year, at this time, everyone will know my name.”