At least most of the members of the so-called Lost Generation of Heavyweights back in the 1980s were drug addicts or food addicts or both. So what's the excuse for the sorry excuses for heavyweight champions plying their trade today?

That is the first question that came to mind after watching Wladimir Klitschko plod along for nearly 11 rounds with an uncooperative but utterly non-aggressive challenger (in name only) named Tony Thompson in front of him Saturday night in Hamburg, Germany. The way they fought the fight should have been staged in Bologna.

One cannot truly be called a "challenger'' if one is making no effort to challenge anyone and Thompson certainly seemed to have no intention of giving Klitschko the mistaken impression he might want to win the fight. At one point even Thompson's frustrated trainer, Tom Browner, said to him in his corner, "You're not trying. You're better than this.''

Maybe not, Tom, but don't worry about it because there won't be another Tony Thompson sighting again on national television any time soon.

Then again, one cannot truly be called a champion, except for the sorry lot of heavyweights working today, if it takes you 11 rounds to knock out someone like Thompson. Thompson cannot punch, he cannot move and he cannot jab. He can play defense apparently but that was primarily because he kept both hands pinned to his ears as if they had been sutured to the side of his head. This made it difficult for Klitschko to either land his jab or the kind of right that ultimately did get through and knocked Thompson out at 1:22 of the 11th round.

Unfortunately for witnesses, that knockout came about four rounds after Thompson quit, which says something about Thompson and more about Klitschko. At this point one might say where's Joe Louis when you need him? Or bring back Lennox Lewis, for that matter. But after watching the latest in what has become a seemingly endless string of heavyweight disappointments one actually is moved to lower one's expectation and conclude – where's Eddie Machen when you need him?

For those unfamiliar with the San Francisco heavyweight, Machen lost a 12-round decision to Sonny Liston in 1960 and a 15-round decision to Ernie Terrell for the WBA title in 1965 among various other accomplishments during his time as a title contender. If the late Machen were fighting today he'd have enough title belts to open up a clothing store.

Klitschko (51-3, 45 KO) was coming off a desultory points victory over then WBO champion Sultan Ibragimov in his last outing at Madison Square Garden and had promised to end his tussle with Thompson quickly to make up for the bad taste left in the mouth of everyone who watched him and Ibragimov look at each other for 12 rounds. Well, some promises aren't kept and this was one of them but that wasn't the worst of it.

The worst of it was the way Klitschko reacted to a cut above his right eye late in the second round. Referee Joe Cortez ruled the cut had come from a left hand from Thompson. Perhaps it was but it was followed quickly by an involuntary clash of heads that left both men bleeding above their right eye.

Thompson (31-2, 19 KO) reacted to his situation calmly. For the next few rounds however, Klitschko looked like a guy who thought he might need a blood transfusion. Uncertain and obviously daunted, Klitschko was bleeding from the lower lip and mouth as well by the end of the fourth round, although it was difficult to fathom how that happened because if Thompson had been touching the champion with any lighter blows they would have had to have been used to blow out birthday candles.

Still Klitschko seemed in some distress, as well as frustrated at his inability to hit the 6-foot-5 southpaw with his jab or the kind of combinations he'd expected to bomb him with.

He did land some thunderous straight rights but Thompson took all of them without wobbling until he suddenly seemed to grow despondent around round seven and eight and simply stopped trying to win. Instead of punching, he simply waited and waited and waited. For what only he knows but as Browner began to plead with him more and more in his corner to fight back Thompson kept mumbling, "Trust me now,'' as if he had some sort of plan he had not shared with Browner or anyone else.

If he did, he also didn't share it with Klitschko, who began to sense that Thompson was now no longer intending to fight for the heavyweight title. Or fight at all for that matter.

Emboldened, Klitschko began to press Thompson more in rounds eight and nine and by the 10th was confident enough to wrestle him to the ground after having drilled him in the body. The two fell in a heap with Klitschko on top after he'd stepped on Thompson's foot as the challenger tried to retreat.

The challenger went down like he'd been sacked by Michael Strahan and took a long time to get up. When he did he limped around for several minutes as if his right leg had been injured. This was, it seemed, the excuse he needed to go collect his $500,000 purse, which was larger than his total fistic income in the previous 32 fights of his career.

Perhaps Klitschko realized what Browner seemed to sense several rounds earlier, which was that Thompson's resolve had been broken because he stormed after him in the 11th and floored him with a straight right hand on the chin that came just as Thompson threw a looping left hook. The hook was so wide, Klitschko shot his right inside it on a straight line and it got to Thompson's chin before the wide left came anywhere near Klitschko and down Thompson went on his back as the partisan crowd of Klitschko supporters rose in approval at the jam-packed Color Line Arena.

Frankly, it appeared Thompson could have gotten up but he did what guys who don't want to get up but know they should have done for decades in boxing. He waited until Cortez's count had reached 9 ½ and then pushed himself off the deck, knowing Cortez would rule it a

knockout. Thankfully he did because to have been required to watch another four and a half minutes of what had just transpired over the previous 40 or so was simply asking too much of anyone who has a reverence for what heavyweight boxing used to be.

“This man was unbelievably determined,’’ Klitschko said after his hand had been raised and his path toward another meaningless mandatory defense against undefeated No. 1 IBF challenger Alexander Povetkin (15-0, 11 KOs, 2004 Olympic gold medalist) had been cleared. “He fought perfectly.’’

Only if he traveled over 6,000 miles not to win. Browner even brought that point up between rounds once when he said “We didn’t come all this way to fight like this.’’

Maybe he didn’t but it was pretty obvious why Tony Thompson was there. He was there to collect a check. What Wladimir Klitschko was doing is another matter but one thing is sure - it wasn’t enhancing either his resume or his reputation.