

Someone Will Fall Hard In Berlin

Written by Phil Woolever
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BERLIN OR BUST - I've been lucky enough to see, close up, some of the finest action in relatively recent heavyweight boxing history.

The biggest thuds I recall came in the first Mike Tyson-Frank Bruno fight.

Some of the heaviest exchanges were in Evander Holyfield- Michael Dokes.

The most electric intensity occurred in either the initial Holyfield-Tyson epic or the moment George Foreman splattered Michael Moorer.

Typing this on a cold, drizzly German afternoon makes me miss the wild warmth of Vegas, but it's still easy to get plenty psyched up for this weekend's gloved encounter between Samuel Peter and Vitali Klitschko at the gleaming new O2 World Arena in Berlin, not too shabby a hot spot hub of humanity itself.

It's probably a stretch to imagine that Klitschko-Peter will achieve any of the same aforementioned classic conking combinations, but it's not unrealistic at all to say the battle for WBC laurels could be an excellent whapathon. If the fistic fates are kind, we may even witness a new millennium version of the Foreman-Ron Lyle two-way, multiple knockdown thriller.

Coming in on paper, either contestant has a solid chance to win in spectacular fashion. This certainly isn't a golden age for the big boys, but Klitschko-Peter could still emerge as one of the better brawls in the division's storied annals. Even back in the legendary long ago times of fighters like Joe Louis, Jack Dempsey and Jack Johnson, minimum skilled, maximum strength hulks created premium thrills and spills.

Both principals and their teams seemed on the appropriate edge in the countdown to fight night, displaying a mix of disciplined class and reserved fury during press conference call modes.

"I didn't lose my title in a fight, I gave it up," said Klitschko, "Now I want it back. I feel great and I'm very hungry for the fight. I took a break for three and a half years and it was a great time for me to recover (from injuries). I'm healthy right now and I don't want to underestimate Samuel Peter, because he is a very strong fighter. I've followed his career and I know the fight won't be easy. This fight will be seen in more than one hundred countries around the world. It will be a real heavyweight title fight, between a champion who didn't lose his title and an active world champion."

"I just want to thank God for everything and for giving me an opportunity to redeem myself (from other fights)," said Peter, "I'm so happy. This is my dream, to fight in Germany, because I've heard about it my entire career. It's a great place to make history. I'm still the WBC champion, I don't know what gives him a right to step in my spotlight or what gives him the right

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to step in my heaven. I'm ready, ready to go."

"I've been with Samuel for every one of his fights for the past eight years," said manager Ivaylo Gotzev, "This is by far his best preparation."

Evaluating some of the knuckle knowing numbers offers conflicting hints in each boxer's deciding direction.

28 year old Peter, 30-1 (23), has almost a decade's advantage in youthful energy compared to 37 year old Klitschko, 35-2 (34).

Listed at 6'7 1/2, Klitschko towers over 6'0 1/2 Peter, but Klitschko's measured reach is only three inches more, at 80 to 77. A lot comes down to whether or not Peter can maul his way in, what blasting he achieves once there, or if Klitschko can apply the hammer from overhead first.

To me, the most crucial numbers probably involve dates on the calendar. The first is June 23rd, 2003 at Staples Center when Klitschko made a strong stand against Lennox Lewis at by far the highest level either Klitschko or Peter has performed at yet. Still, it was a defeat, however stirring. Much was made of the fact that Klitschko was ahead 58-56 on all cards before being stopped on a severe cut, but make no mistake, Lewis was way ahead in terms of damaging shots and about to finish the job.

Peter fought on the undercard, stopping seasoned journeyman Lyle McDowell. Since then, Peter has fought seventeen times, losing only once in a close decision to Klitschko's younger brother Wladimir. Klitschko has only fought three times since their shared Staples scene.

Which leads to the next calendar clue, November of 2004 at Mandalay Bay. That month, Peter stached Jeremy Williams in a two round blowout that established the "Nigerian Nightmare" as a force.

A week later in the same ring, Klitschko smashed surprise Tyson conquerer Danny Williams to the canvas repeatedly to make a legitimate claim as the best of the heavyweight ranks, after Lewis's retirement.

Klitschko hasn't fought since, after a string of physical setbacks including knee surgery.

Peter has fought ten times during that span, against very strong competition like Wladimir, James Toney (winning twice), and Oleg Maskaev (an impressive KO).

I can only guess whether Klitschko's layoff turns out a help or a hindrance.

Peter's trainer Stacey McKinley offered his unsubtle opinion.

"We'll get a knockout, no doubt about it," mused McKinley, "The headline is going to read 'Murder She Wrote.' Boxing history repeats itself, I've seen this play out with Larry Holmes. When Muhammad Ali came back to fight Holmes you saw what happened. When Holmes came

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back against a young Tyson you saw what happened. Now Klitschko is coming back against a young Sam Peter. After the Jameel McCline fight (Peter rallied from multiple knockdowns for a narrow victory) I went back to Nigeria with Samuel to make sure he kept honing his skills."

"He's a totally different fighter. A reporter asked about our strategy and I said it's just like a vulture going straight for the anus. We're not fooling around."

"I have a very good sparring partner who looks just like Peter," jabbed Klitschko in response, "Some are a little bit bigger, some are a little bit smaller, some are exactly the same. Actually, I had to order some new ones because a couple couldn't spar any more. What I want to say to Samuel is I'm sorry. Wladimir beat you and you had to wait a couple years for another chance."

"He says he has a sparring partner like me but nobody fights like me," countered Peter, "When I hit him he'll remember he made a mistake. The Klitschkos fight like they're robots. I'm not a robot. I beat his brother but they gave him the fight. It's not going to go long. Then I'll teach him how to win an election."

"He says he's been chopping wood," said Klitschko, "Maybe that's good in a movie. If he wants to practice like that, I have a lot of land in Siberia with a lot of trees for him. I can't say if Peter is better (now) or not. You saw the fight against Wladimir. You saw the fight against McCline. You can decide.""

"I've never given up or had a fight stopped," said Peter in reference to Klitschko's loss of face against Chris Byrd.

Each man calmed down as the fight drew nearer and the urge for bitter hype subsided.

"I don't really have anything against you," admitted Klitschko, "I just want to get my title back."

"I don't have anything against you in my heart (either)." concluded Peter.

So what happens Saturday night in Berlin? Only one of Klitschko's fights (a decision win against Timo Hoffman in November 2000) has gone the distance, and this one figures to be over by the halfway point.

It's quite likely that he who connects first connects last.

Your guess is as good as mine regarding who wins, but mine hinges on the similar body type McCline fight, and glimpses of a very plodding (though now much improved) Peter a few times in his early days.

Something tells me Klitschko manages to turn back thumping time to a performance like he had against Lewis, and a big win like he had against Williams.

But remember if you're betting, Peter is just one shot away from making that a foolish call.