Hasim Rahman got an early birthday present this week when it was confirmed that he was picked to replace the injured Alexander Povetkin against consensus world heavyweight champion Wladimir Klitschko on December 13th at the SAP Arena in Mannheim, Germany.

Realistic odds on whether Rahman, 45-6-2 (36 KOs), who turns 36 years old on November 7, can capitalize on the opportunity shape up like a substantial longshot at five weeks away from the opening bell. Still, in the division's historically gloved grand scheme of things a well traveled "The Rock" probably has a more solid shot at beating Klitschko than he did when he headed out to South Africa in April of 2001 to face Lennox Lewis.

Whether landing them or taking them, Rahman has a highlight reel career from vastly varied solid shots, none more spectacular than the fifth frame firework he splattered Lewis with to capture WBC and IBF laurels. In an immediate rematch the following November, fate and the big shot were reversed as a better prepared Lewis delivered on previously assumed domination and regained his belts after flattening Rahman in four.

Rahman has seen an up and down campaign among the big boys. Could he suddenly be just a month away from another big upswing?

"Klitschko is going to regret choosing me," said Rahman when the fight was formally announced, "This is another great chance for me. I'm going to knock him out, then I'm going to knock out his brother."

After a less than stellar recent resume, Rahman must understand that he was probably considered a pretty safe choice to keep the well-oiled promotional machine of Klitschko's K2 empire rolling along.

Oleg Maskeav, who stopped Rahman twice, including an August '08 clash for the WBC belt, lobbied hard for the opportunity against Klitschko, but word around Germany was that Maskaev priced himself out while team Rahman agreed to appear at a comparatively bargain basement price.

If such speculation is accurate, it may show that Rahman has a helpful motivating hunger again, not to mention rejuvenated confidence. The rumored "short money" could turn out to be a multi-million dollar investment in rematch clauses or further paydays.

"Marketing is (now) much easier than it would have been with Povetkin," said Klitschko manager Bernd Boente. "There is much more interest worldwide."

The contest will be broadcast live in Germany by RTL TV.

Rahman is coming of a controversial July "no decision" ruling in a three round debacle against

James Toney. The two fought to a hotly disputed draw in March of 2006 while Rahman treaded water as a faded contender. In between, he scored an 10th round TKO against Zuri Lawrence in November 2007.

Much of Rahman's rumbling inactivity was beyond his control.

Sometimes it's a small world in the upper echelons of heavyweight boxing. Rahman was scheduled to fight older Klitschko brother Vitali what seemed like dozens of times, starting in April of '05, but that bout was canceled due to Vitali's training injuries. A pair of subsequently slated summer slugouts were also shelved. It looked like the pair would actually get it on that November, but Klitschko was re-injured and temporarily retired.

In the mean time, Rahman captured the "interim" WBC title in August '08 with a unanimous decision over Monte Barrett, who tests David Haye a few weeks before Rahman meets Klitschko.

His future options might not be the most attractive matches in the sport, but if Rahman performs well he could insure his family a bigger nest egg. A match against the similarly proportioned Haye could actually be an excellent brawl.

So far, Rahman has managed to stay in the mauling mix for many moons. Now he gets another big chance.

Maybe the most intriguing common denominator for Klitschko-Rahman is Corrie Sanders, who Rahman scored a 7th round TKO against in May of 2000, the same Sanders who later clubbed Klitschko out in two rounds in March of '03.

Make no mistake, on paper at least, Klitschko-Rahman is an intriguing affair.

Klitschko is usually in great condition, but he hasn't exactly looked unbeatable lately. He's been monotonously methodical in his last two fights, against Tony Thompson (KO11), in July and a boring 12 round nod over Sultan Ibragimov in February.

Most vital, Klitschko's chin is always suspect.

All it could take to flip the division is one Rahman punch. Ask Lewis.

"I'm not (overly) impressed with Rahman," stated Klitschko to the media. "I know from when he was supposed to meet my brother that he's always talking big. I definitely will not underestimate him. I know Rahman is a tough, experienced fighter. I'm looking forward to Mannheim, and I'm sure the atmosphere will be terrific."

Relative recent forms, hometown fan considerations and the fact Klitschko was getting primed to peak on fight night put Rahman around at least a 4-1 underdog in my book.

It's an unknown factor what condition Rahman was in when he got the call, or how much he

can prepare to perform at the necessary level within a month's restraints, but he's not the worst bet.

Rahman's 80 inch reach is listed the same as Klitschko's.

More than the reach, this old- new challenger has already proved a mighty surprising grasp.