

No St. Paddy's Day Brew-Haha For Duddy

Written by Michael Woods

Monday, 16 March 2009 19:00

The streets of New York, or, at least, the ones close to an Irish pub, are dense with revelers at 1 PM. Wearing all shades of green, singing chants with varying degrees of clarity, depending on their level of alcohol intake, the revelers are frolicking in a joyous fashion. They haven't yet made a severe dent in their jugs of "fortified" Gatorade, and their buzz hasn't yet leapt from the giddy zone, into the disoriented, or cantankerous, zone. But inside Legends pub on 33rd St., underneath the Empire State building, there is a man who in previous years was no stranger to a concentrated session of hoist, toast and gulp.

The man is in a good mood, quick to a grin, but there is an air of business about him. He grabs a glass, and toasts the people gathered in a downstairs nook. But, it is apparent to all in attendance, that the glass is filled with nothing but H2O. No amber liquids are in the cards for John Duddy, who hails from Derry in Northern Ireland, because he realizes that his celebration won't really kick in until gets to where he wants to be, in a boxing ring, fighting Kelly Pavlik for the middleweight championship of the world.

There will be time for tossing back brews, maybe as soon as late fall. A Kelly Pavlik-John Duddy makes infinite sense...two Caucasians in a sport lacking in Caucasian talents, both with a penchant for fighting trade-fest, fan-friendly scraps. Will it happen? Duddy advisor Craig Hamilton is working on it; he's had a bunch of talks with Pavlik promoter Bob Arum, and his matchmaking ace Bruce Trampler. They agree the fight makes sense...but are being cagey on exactly when it makes the most sense.

Pavlik will glove up against Sergio Mora in the summertime, it looks like, and while TSS thinks Mora can't outbox the Ghost for 12 rounds, one never does know, until one knows. Mora was in a zone in his first fight with Vernon Forrest in June 2008, when he earned a majority decision win and snagged Forrest's junior middleweight title. Mora was out of the zone, way, way out of the zone in the Forrest rematch three months later, when he was handily outpointed. Bottom line, TSS sees Pavlik as being way too much man for Mora to handle, if and when that bout comes off.

So Duddy is cleared for a title shot, right? Not so fast, Quickdraw. The Derry Destroyer can't just sit around, waiting for the ship to come to him. He needs to stay busy, and keep on doing that remedial work with new trainer Pat Burns which he unveiled at Madison Square Garden on Feb. 21 (Cotto-Jennings undercard) against Matt Vanda. It was Duddy's fourth straight points win, and he upped his mark to 26-0. The way he did it was impressive, if not to some of his fans who love to ride the Duddy rollercoaster of drama, dig seeing him battle back from the brink, wipe the blood out of his eyes, and roar back from a bad place. Duddy outboxed Vanda, a tough, in-shape hitter who has emerged as a most useful steppingstone/resume builder in the last three years. He worked the jab, kept his hands high, moved, moved, moved, and didn't let the Irish blood in him well up. He didn't get into one of his trademarked tradefests, and thus, some of his fans were bummed. But trainer Pat Burns wasn't miffed. To the contrary, he was amped. Duddy said he was sorry for getting off track in the tenth, Vanda's best round.

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“That stand my ground and slug mentality is still in me,” Duddy told TSS at Legends. “It’s still in my heart to let it slug. I said to Pat after that I was disappointed. He told me he was happy, I did it for nine rounds. It’s that tenth round we’ll work on. I was happy to hear that. Now I’m not questioning myself, my style. I’m not as eager to trade.”

Asked to attach a name to that old version of himself who tends to get undisciplined, and fire away with fury and without an eye towards defense, Duddy pondered and answered, “‘Stupid John,’ if you ask me.”

“Smart John,” he hopes, will be in the ring in his next scrap, against Youngstown, Ohio hitter Billy Lyell (18-7). Duddy is a promotional free agent, after splitting with the McLoughlin clan in a nasty divorce. Kathy Duva’s Main Events is running the Duddy-Lyell show, and the fighter is weighing his options on what company to hook up with on a more permanent basis. Main Events may have the inside track, as Duddy’s man Hamilton and Main Events had success working together when Hamilton’s client Michael Grant fought under their banner.

Lyell is in the mode of Vanda, a willing, in shape battler who has been chosen to keep Duddy sharp, and to let him keep his lossless streak intact. But one never knows when someone lands a lucky strike, and Lyell is trained by Pavlik’s trainer, Jack Loew, so Duddy isn’t too cocky going into the April 24 tussle, which will unfold at Duva’s new home base, the Prudential Center in Newark.

“I’m looking forward to putting on an exciting show,” Duddy told the fans and media at Legends. He paused, and added, “Hopefully not to exciting,” breaking into a sly grin.

The Derry Destroyer told TSS that he will be boarding a plane back to Miami, to continue training with Burns, on Tuesday evening. He joked that the flight was booked to insure that he wouldn’t get kidnapped by pals, for a toast or two. “My St. Paddy’s day will come April 25th!” he said.

The fighter was sporting what for him passes as a tan, by the way. He just vacationed for two weeks in the Bahamas, Paradise Island, with fiancée Graine Coll. All his freckles look like tan from ten feet away. On the island, he hooked up with Hollywood leading man Sean Connery, who was in the region, and had heard about the Derry scrapper. They met for lunch, and Connery told Duddy that not more than a few minutes after someone told him Duddy was in the area, he was flipping around the TV, and came across a Duddy TV special, which featured a compilation of his bouts. Connery shared some advice for the fighter, telling him to retain a good lawyer and read every contract top to bottom. He offered to put his people in touch with Duddy to offer their expertise, the boxer said.

It seems like the crew Duddy is with has things under control. What cannot be controlled is what happens in the ring. Sure, to an extent, preparation is the key to victory. But if a fighter brings the flu into the ring with him, or just has an off night, and a journeyman like Lyell enjoys the night of his life, a date with Pavlik could recede further into the future.

Hamilton would like to see Pavlik and Duddy win their respective scraps, and pair them up in

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MSG, or another big arena in late fall. Arum, or fate, may have other plans.

SPEEDBAG Duva said matchmaker Russell Peltz will put Kassim Ouma on the undercard, against TBA.

---Two time NJ Golden Gloves heavyweight champ Patrick Farrell (1-0) will fight in Newark. He'll meet Doug Bowling (0-1) in a cruiserweight match.

---A Pru Center exec was present, and made a good point. You can get a ticket to see a boxing event in Newark for what parking costs at Madison Square Garden. I am hoping to make it to this card in person. I was at the Pru for a UFC event last year, and was impressed by the building.

---Duva said fans should be on the lookout for a terrific Irish rock group, The Shots. They'll be playing their bagpipe-infused rock during breaks.

NOTE: THANKS TO TSS U's ANONY, WHO MADE THAT NEAT GRAPHIC FOR US. THANKS ANONY!