In the fight game, publicity is not always directly proportionate to talent. Just ask Juan Carlos Gomez.

Despite being one of the most dominant cruiserweight champions in history, tallying ten defenses of the WBC cruiserweight title, and owning a 44-1 (35 KOs) record, his name in the Stateside fight media is more allied with failure than success.

The German-based Cuban will challenge Vitali Klitschko in Stuttgart on Saturday for the latter's WBC heavyweight belt in a fight that has been derided by most sections of the US boxing media. Ron Borges advised potential viewers of Klitschko-Gomez that, "If it ends up on your television screen here in the States [it will be screened live on ESPN] remember this – the TV comes with a channel changer and an ON/OFF switch. Use them."

The downbeat air surrounding the matchup has been bolstered by a plethora of negative headlines that have constantly followed the 35-year-old Gomez.

Most notably, his shocking 106 second knockout loss to club fighter Yanqui Diaz, in which Gomez was nailed with 17 consecutive right hands, is a Youtube favorite among boxing fans. In what was his third US appearance, Gomez sauntered into the ring in his characteristic laid-back manner with a glossy 37-0 résumé, but the subsequent bludgeoning brought glee to those that take pleasure in deriding foreign heavyweights.

Gomez then went under the radar, fighting exclusively in Europe before returning to the US for a stint at Freddie Roach's Wild Card Gym in LA. But the venture did little to boost Gomez' pitiable reputation after Roach told reporters earlier this year that MMA fighter Andrei Arlovski was competing "50-50" with the Cuban in sparring sessions. The comment generated significant exposure for Gomez in the MMA community, with many followers erroneously using it as evidence that top martial artists could beat boxers at their own game.

Moreover, Gomez' actions outside the ring have not helped endear him to an already skeptical media. Following a lopsided points win over a 40-year-old Oliver McCall in 2005, Gomez failed a postfight urinalysis, testing positive for cocaine. The bout was subsequently declared a "no contest" and Gomez was let go by his then-promoter Universum.

The Cuban vociferously denied taking such a substance and released a test several months later that showed no illegal drugs in his system. He claimed his postfight sample had been tampered and accused officials of trying to sabotage his career. The fighter maintains the ordeal left him disillusioned and in need of solace.

"After they stole my victory over Oliver McCall because of doping in October 2005 I was totally devastated," Gomez said in 2007. "I swear that I never doped in my life. After the fight I went to the USA where I was built up by the Black Muslim community. That's why I converted to Islam."

Yet things didn't get much smoother for Gomez. After signing with Arena Box-Promotion, he attempted to terminate the deal in late 2007, and left Germany for the US without notifying the promoters. A war of words broke out between the fighter and head of the promotional outfit Ahmet Öner, with both sides using the media to ridicule each other. Gomez claimed Arena Box weren't paying him sufficiently, while Öner provided the Cuban with some sage advice, stating: "Everybody knows that you're better using your hands in the ring than using your brain and mouth outside".

The two sides ultimately reconciled, but the incident only solidified Gomez' reputation for eccentricity.

It is perhaps not remarkable that his focus on boxing has been so unsteady given that he never had any intention of becoming a boxer.

"I didn't choose boxing, they chose it for me in Cuba," Gomez alleged.

Gomez originally had aspirations to be a baseball player, but in Cuba citizens can't always make their own decisions and he was purportedly forced into boxing by the authorities. Annoyed with his homeland's system, Gomez absconded while competing in a tournament in Germany and thereafter began his professional career in the cruiserweight division.

The 6'3" southpaw made light work of the weak contenders, claiming the WBC title in 1998 from the durable but limited Marcelo Dominguez in Argentina to become the first Cuban to win a professional boxing championship since Fidel Castro's ascension to power some 39 years earlier. And despite prevailing over Dominguez in a rematch the following year, Gomez' mental fragility was evidenced when he surprisingly admitted he felt like quitting after the eight round of his apparently undemanding points victory.

Despite not possessing one-punch knockout power, Gomez finished off most of his cruiserweight challengers by overwhelming them with speedy combinations from his languid, free-flowing style. After growing bored with turning back obscure opposition, Gomez made his heavyweight debut by stopping Al Cole in 2001 before making his US debut two years later in an HBO-televised encounter with the unbeaten Sinan Samil Sam.

Gomez cruised to a wide points win over the plodding Turk and while it was not a performance that excited the masses, he impressed many observers with his swift footwork and fluid punching. Yet any momentum generated was lost as Gomez remained inactive for eleven months, while his next fight was the 2004 demolition by Diaz in Texas.

Gomez appeared out of shape that night, scaling a then-career high of 228 pounds and looking plainly disinterested as the contest commenced.

"I knew Yanqui Diaz was no match for me. I was then given just two weeks notice for the fight," claimed Gomez. "[Diaz] surprised me in the first round. That's what can happen to a heavyweight when you're not in shape."

But Gomez brought that lax attitude into subsequent fights, most notably when he was staggered by McCall during their October 2007 rematch. Gomez, who has a habit of taunting opponents, seemed to grow bored with his dominance of that fight and apparently lost concentration as McCall caught him with a right hand.

Gomez recovered to triumph by unanimous decision, but the experience may have jolted him into a renewed sense of dedication. In his most recent outing, a comfortable points win over the 6'5" 240-pound Vladimir Virchis last September, Gomez fought diligently, utilizing his speed and sharp jab to avoid the heavy-handed Ukrainian.

And while Gomez entered that bout at his highest ever weight of 233 pounds, the mass gain was due to extensive strength work and the fighter looked well-defined and sturdy.

Gomez will need to be in similar condition if he is to withstand the 6'7", 250-pound Vitali Klitschko. Gomez' opposition at heavyweight has been soft and even the encounter with Virchis will have done little to prepare him for Klitschko's sharp, unorthodox left and jerky upper-body movement.

Gomez likes to fight with his hands low and maintain a relaxed tempo with a prodding jab, but that approach will be his undoing in the face of Klitschko's rugged determination.

Klitschko, 36-2 (35 KOs), made it clear that had little interest in making his mandatory defence against Gomez, preferring a more lucrative showdown with David Haye, but the titlist eventually decided to adhere to the WBC's wishes. And even though the Ukrainian may initially have been disinterested in Saturday's event, for Klitschko that doesn't necessarily translate into a lacklustre attitude come fight time.

Some verbal jousting has added a little spice to the occasion, with both fighters claiming superiority in sparring sessions that took place a decade ago, but that has failed to ignite significant interest in what will be ESPN's first ever live screening of a heavyweight title fight.

Regardless, Gomez will prove a more diverse challenge for Klitschko than what Samuel Peter provided last October. Unlike the immobile Nigerian, Gomez should offer movement and speed that should be a sterner test of the 37-year-old champion's questionable stamina.

"I am more experienced than Vitali though I am younger and faster than him," Gomez told ESPN. "And I know exactly what to do in the ring. I will be too fast and too much to handle for the robot. Of course, I know that he can punch, but he will not even see me and you cannot hit what you cannot see."

Gomez has recently been working with the Miami-based Cuban trainer, Orlando Cuellar, who has a reputation for being a strict taskmaster. To be competitive with Klitschko, Gomez should box an efficient, tactical fight involving lateral movement and rapid-fire combinations. And he must stringently adhere to that strategy – something he is unaccustomed to doing.

Yet as Freddie Roach says, "As long as [Gomez] is disciplined he can become heavyweight

champion of the world.”