

## John Duddy Has Been On The Cusp Before

Written by Michael Woods  
Tuesday, 21 April 2009 19:00

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Brighter days, featuring checks with a couple more zeros tacked on than he's been accustomed to, are up ahead for John Duddy if he keeps on winning. 'Course, those brighter days were supposed to have arrived, in the mind of those that have followed the pro career of the Derry Destroyer, who gloves up against Ohio journeyman Billy Lyell on Friday night in Newark, NJ, last year.

Duddy was in line for a St. Paddy's day clash with then middleweight champion Jermain Taylor in 2008, but Kelly Pavlik knocked over that appletart in September 2007. So Team Duddy recast their sites, and targeted Pavlik. There was the matter of staying unbeaten, in order to best present the Irish banger to the masses who would be plunking down their spare cash for a PPV.

But Duddy needed to keep rust at bay, so he took a 'stay busy' bout in February 2008, on the Wladimir Klitschko-Sultan Ibragimov undercard. He was to take on Walid Smichet, seemingly a perfect foil for the occasion. The Tunisian—that in itself was part of the seemingly sweet script, who after all can name half a handful of fearsome Tunisian sweet scientists?---came in with a 17-2-3 mark, so his record was credible. His ability to render a foe unconscious, the chief worry to Team Duddy as they looked ahead to their big shot opportunity, that retirement account-stuffing megafight, was something close to nil. But Smichet rose to the occasion, and fought like something other than the so-so journeyman he was supposed to be. Or maybe Duddy fought more like the so-so journeyman his backers insisted he was not...Regardless, Duddy and Smichet were back and forth, and if one came in out of the cold, and were asked to assess their tussle, and point to the most promising pugilist, the one deserved of a title shot, one would be left scratching their head, reaching into one's pocket, and pulling out a coin to flip.

But Duddy did have his hand raised in the ring at Madison Square Garden. A win is a win is a win, right? Win now, look good next time, right? Not so fast, not this time. Fight fans can be a gullible lot, but with the presence of BoxRec and YouTube, it isn't as easy to BS to masses, and present them a McDonald's hamburger patty and tell them it's Kobe beef. Bob Arum, Pavlik's promoter, could not even use his superior powers of persuasion, and try to sell Duddy as anything beyond a likeable lad with a football sized heart, and a skill set that could fit in a spitbucket. Duddy had to reassess, re-evaluate his career, and clamber back up the few rungs he dropped down. He did so, with the aid of Patrick Burns, the Florida trainer who honed Jermain Taylor into the pugilist who was able to take two from Bernard Hopkins, no small feat.

On Friday night, fight fans can assess for themselves, if they travel to Newark, and see how far Duddy has come, and if he deserves a title shot against Pavlik, or against another middleweight beltholder (like Felix Sturm or Arthur Abraham). This will be the third fight for Duddy under the gaze of Burns, who has instilled in him a most basic, and most useful mindset—everything, son, works off the jab.

TSS liked what they saw of Duddy in his last outing, a UD10 effory against in shape, durable

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Matt Vanda in New York. There were precious few moments when Duddy was in his crowd pleasing, take two to give one, the best D is a good O-mode. And Burns loved it. We shall see if the not-super-young dog, who turns 30 in June, will continue to stick to the Burns plan, or if he will revert to his old tricks against Lyell, who figures to be ready to rock, fired up to upset the future plans for Duddy.

Lyell is trained by Pavlik's trainer, Jack Loew, and when I asked Duddy if he would be looking to perhaps step on the gas a bit more against Lyell, to show Loew what Pavlik might be in for, the Irishman turned the tables on me.

"Are you a fighter?" he asked me.

I told him I dabbled, that I did it for a year, enough to figure out a bit better what the pros goes through when they lace on the gloves and test their mettle.

"I don't dabble," he said, with an edge. "I'm not fighting Jack Loew, Pat Burns isn't fighting Billy Lyell." (Note: a keyboard tapper takes the risk of raising the ire of a fighter that much more the closer it is to fight time. Understandable...But I am not a fan of the practice of asking a fightwriter, who after all is theoretically in your corner, as he provides free advertising, which puts money in your pocket, if he is actually a fighter, because the implication when you ask that, is that the question you have just received could only be asked by someone who hasn't stepped in a ring. But we tappers dish it out, and must be able to take it every now and again....)

Far be it from me to not take what Duddy says at face value, but a portion of me has to believe that he will be quite aware that Loew will be sizing him up, getting a superb scouting report on the Derry man, and will decide on Friday how much Duddy does or doesn't have, whether he presents a credible challenge to Pavlik.

I also asked Duddy in the phoner Tuesday whether he predicts a stoppage win against Lyell, who has been stopped in three of his seven losses. The Irishman said he would be happy with the win, no matter the time or method. "A kayo or points, it's the same the end of the day," he said. Not to be reflexively contrarian, but to me, it would tell me something if Duddy were to stop Lyell, who went the distance against Vanes Martiroysan on February 3 in Anaheim. But I'm guessing this 'just get the win' mentality suits Duddy best, because it helps keep him away from his former crowd pleasing bent. When he simply concentrates on winning rounds, in safe, smart, risk averse fashion, he gets that much closer to that coffer filling fight, that mega payday.

Duddy was in camp with Burns from March 17, St. Paddy's day, to April 20th, and he enjoyed the session. "I'm quite happy to go to Florida and get my butt kicked by Pat Burns," he said, chuckling.

Interestingly, Duddy doesn't choose to present Burns as the missing piece of the puzzle. He

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says that he keeps things that he learned from Harry Keitt, and Don Turner in his arsenal, and believes that his maturity has allowed to him to get where he is now, which is the number four and second ranked 160er in the WBC and WBO, respectively.

He says there is no way he will look past Lyell, to the big one, and based on his experience against Smichet, that makes tons of sense. "My camp doesn't think like that, what is next," he said. "Especially with the experience we had in the past, we're not in a position to dream, to talk like that." But might he fall into a mode where he's auditioning for Loew, and start looking to load up instead of working off the job? I am curious to see, and will travel to Newark to check it out for myself. Want to check out Duddy, or the nice arena in Newark? The Prudential Center has seats for sale, at \$38, \$53, \$78, \$103 and \$253. They can be purchased at Prudential Center Box Office or by calling that odious entity Ticketmaster at 201-507-8900. Doors open at 8:00pm. A multi-ethnic Fan Festival will be held 6:00 – 8:00pm at Entry Plaza, corner of Mulberry and Edison Streets with food, beverages and entertainment.

SPEEDBAG By the way, have to give a little shoutout to Ellen Haley. She is with Main Events in PR, and in the short time I have been dealing with her, it is obvious she goes above and beyond in getting the word out on their fighters, and in trying to make the job of the keyboard tapper that much smoother. Good work, and good people, need to be applauded.