

## Red Meat For TSS Masses: Wooly Throws Out HEAVY Theories

Written by Phil Woolever  
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TALES FROM THE BASHING BLACK FOREST - Things have been looking up lately in the heavyweight ranks.

Public perception of the big boys still has a considerable margin of improvement to be made before the lingering taint of too many sub-par years is sufficiently polished off in the general public consciousness, but at least some recent news regarding the 200 plus pounders' division has been delivered with an optimistic slant.

Contests like last Friday's KO by Kevin Johnson of Devin Vargas or Eddie Chambers' win over Samuel Peter give further hope that slowly but surely, more true heavyweight title contenders and those harboring designs to be considered as such are willing to risk that status against other like-minded individuals, managers and promoters.

For me, the announcement that Chambers was going to tackle Alexander Dimitrenko in July was the best possible scenario besides Wladimir Klitschko's pending June 20th defense against David Haye for making a case that affairs of the glove are actually getting fairly interesting among the battling behemoths.

Even going along with the constant chorus among The Sweet Science.com's knowledgeable legion of opinion posters that bemoans the current state of the heavies, it's not a stretch to say that Klitschko-Haye could end up being almost as important a fight as Manny Pacquiao-Ricky Hatton turned out. Going in to each event there's quite a margin in pound for pound status attached, but perhaps it shouldn't be as much as many people suggest.

Whatever dukeout doctrine the loathers of extra large size lumping lads wish to profess, if Haye manages to stop Klitschko in dramatic fashion, the flamboyantly loud and loutish Brit will have earned himself serious consideration for at least a mid-range spot in any reasonable pound for pound list.

A grandiose knockout victory for Haye may rank as the most brash splash since Muhammad Ali's Clay day surprise over Sonny Liston, a fighter who may or may not have been able to stop Klitschko himself (I assume Ali would defeat either Klitschko brother, rope-a-dope style, ten times out of ten, but that doesn't mean it would be easy or pretty).

Whatever position you argue for about whether or not the heavyweight division is near an all time low, something pretty much non-debatable is which side of the pounding pond holds the superior practitioners.

Currently, most top heavyweights have a home base outside the United States. In terms of both prowess and marketability, there's a lot more bang for the euro than there is for the buck.

I'm not alleging that every clash involving somebody like Nickolai Valuev or Ruslan Chagaev,

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who meet again in a couple weeks for what could end up as a slow motion mammoth collision, is going to be a thrilling contest. Whatever occurs in Helsinki, as long as there's a clear winner, is good for the overall ratings.

The punching point is that despite what is often a lambasted lack of flamboyance on their behalf, certain European heavyweights manage to stay in the win column enough to claim most of the top spots in today's global rankings.

In fact, while I don't agree, it could be argued that there are no fighters from the USA who actually deserve to be ranked in the current top ten.

Like it or not, John Ruiz is probably the only North American citizen who can claim a spot in the top ten based on proven opposition, with a resume that completely overshadows any of his active conking, countrymen colleagues. To me, Ruiz remains the top US heavyweight until some other Yank knocks him off that position, though Ruiz should have stayed busier.

Cristobal Arreola vastly improved his stock with the stoppage of Jameel McCline, but it still wasn't enough to justify putting Arreola in the top ten.

That's not to say the streaking Arreola hasn't earned a position as the most likely or popular popper to meet a Klitschko next, in a fight that will probably happen in LA's Staples Center fairly soon. That bout, in Vitali K's adopted hometown, is a natural fit marketing wise and should be an obvious choice for both promoters and fans.

Arreola may therefore currently be on deck as the most likely USA fighter to collect a belt, but I think Chambers, or even Tony Thompson has a better chance. Lamon Brewster, anyone?

In a way, the overflow of large, competent European competitors (many are relocated from 'Eastern blocs') especially in German areas I've witnessed, may have an incubating effect similar to what featherweight types in Mexico used to go through in the days I saw the other side of the border there. Those fighters got tough because even though their formative fights may not have been against the best potential foes, they were still trading taps with very rugged individuals before wild crowds in forges that prepared them well for ventures into California or Vegas.

On a lesser planetary scale so far, the same thing may be happening as guys like Dimitrenko, Chagaev, or Alexander Povetkin make their way through thick gatekeepers who can absorb a ton of leather. Povetkin didn't look very good against Jason Estrada, but Estrada didn't get enough credit for that.

Here's my rankings:

1. Wladimir Klitschko
2. Vitali Klitschko
3. Alexander Dimitrenko
4. Nikolai Valuev

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5. David Haye
6. Ruslan Chagaev
7. John Ruiz
8. Eddie Chambers
9. Alexander Povetkin
10. (tie) Tony Thompson/Jason Estrada/Evander Holyfield

I put Evander in there purely on optimistic sentimentality because (a) I hope he gets enough harmless paydays to recoup some lifestyle luster in a responsible manner befitting an all-time great and (b) Zurich was a blast and a boost for the sport in Europe, like it or not.

I still say my list wouldn't fare so badly overall from top to bottom for a whole decade, against similar rankings from the 1960's, '80's or 90's, and I didn't write this from a coffeeshop in Amsterdam, although I might have liked to.

By the time Deontay Wilder is ready to contend, the heavyweights could be very hot commodities.

Johnson versus Carl Drumond isn't a bad US elimination match on paper, and there are a couple of young lions based in Germany, Denis Boytsov and Alexander Ustinov, who look ready for the big step up.

If Haye does beat Klitschko without any flies in the ointment he should be recognized as the new champion, but does that make him the best heavyweight? It could be similar to when Leon Spinks met Ali while Larry Holmes fought Ken Norton.

Dimitrenko is the wild card in the division and Chambers deserves credit for taking him on immediately after disposing of former titlist Peter. The winner there deserves a title shot by the end of the year.

Following Klitschko-Haye and Dimitrenko-Chambers, when you look at all the possible variables adding the winner of Valuev-Chagaev and throw Vitali K, Povetkin, Ruiz, and Arreola into a round robin mix, the heavyweight division doesn't look so bad to me.

If and whenever any of the aforementioned fighters meet it may well end up as nothing more than a small, smacking stride in the right direction, but if the trend continues enough we could finally see the heavyweights making giant steps again.