

Lennox Lewis-Vitali Klitschko Revisited

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Saturday, 13 June 2009 19:00

On June 21st 2003, Lennox Lewis fought for the final time of his career. His opponent was Vitali Klitschko, the current reigning WBC heavyweight champion. When Lewis fought Klitschko he was the lineal heavyweight champ and was widely perceived as the best fighter in the division. Klitschko, who was viewed by most fight observers to be Lewis's biggest threat and most dangerous opponent, was a replacement for Kirk Johnson, who injured a pectoral muscle during training.

Eight months after stopping Klitschko, Lewis retired as champion with his health, wealth and legacy intact. Since the fight's conclusion the Lewis and Klitschko factions have gone at it non-stop regarding the result of the fight. Moreso it's amazing how some live and die through the ups and downs of their favorite fighter or team. It's almost as if their manhood is threatened if they have to admit their guy lost. If you're a huge fan of either Lennox Lewis or Vitali Klitschko, you might want to stop reading this if you reside outside the world of reality. I live in the real world and as uncomfortable as it may be, I never try to squeeze things so they fit into my perfect world as I hoped it to be. I'm a boxing guy more than I'm a fan of any one fighter.

How the fight was made:

Lewis was scheduled to fight Kirk Johnson on June 21, 2003. Mike Tyson was supposed to fight on the undercard in the hope of stimulating a rematch with Lewis who knocked him out in the eighth round a year earlier. When Tyson pulled out, a fight between Vitali Klitschko and Cedric Boswell was inserted to be part of the undercard in its place. At that time Klitschko was the WBC number one contender and was probably going to be Lewis's next opponent. So having them fight on the same card made sense.

Once Kirk Johnson was injured and couldn't go through with the fight, it seemed plausible to have Klitschko step up and challenge Lewis. At the time Boswell despite being undefeated was viewed as just another opponent. The only upper-tier opponent Vitali had faced before Lewis was Chris Byrd, a fight that he was leading in but suffered a torn rotator cuff that ultimately forced him to withdraw, thus suffering the first set back of his career.

Why The Timing Favored Klitschko:

Whenever the Lewis-Klitschko fight is discussed, there's one aspect surrounding it that's never mentioned and it's huge. That being the mindset of a reigning champion who has reached his pinnacle versus the mindset of a challenger who has had beating that particular champion in the back of his mind since he turned pro.

When Joe Frazier turned pro in 1965 Muhammad Ali was the reigning heavyweight champ. Joe has said numerous times that beating Ali for the title was his goal when he turned pro. When Frazier met and defeated Ali for the undisputed title in 1971, he retired mentally as a fighter afterward. Once he had conquered the fighter he felt he needed to beat to finally get his due as

Lennox Lewis-Vitali Klitschko Revisited

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Saturday, 13 June 2009 19:00

the champ, he became complacent and didn't fight for 11 months, making his first defense against the lightly regarded Terry Daniels.

On top of that Joe never really got in great shape again until fighting Ali in a rematch almost three years later. In the interim he fought the hungry and powerful George Foreman. Forget for a moment that Foreman had the style to beat Frazier and would probably beat him 10 out of 10 times. The issue is that Frazier was too content with himself and viewed George as an untested wild swinging amateur.

Well the same thing applies to Lewis. When Lennox turned pro in 1989, Mike Tyson was the undefeated and undisputed champion. In truth Tyson was the Muhammad Ali of his era, stature-wise. Lewis, like Frazier, knew he'd never get his props as champ until he beat Tyson. Lewis and Tyson were slated to fight a few different times but something always disrupted it. Tyson paid Lewis four million dollars to step aside so he could defend his WBA title against Bruce Seldon, despite Lewis being the top ranked contender.

Finally they met in June of 2002 and Lewis got the monkey off his back after scoring an eighth round knockout victory over Tyson. Once Lennox had conquered Tyson, he retired mentally as a fighter. He only took the fight with Kirk Johnson to make some money and buy time until he officially decided what he wanted to do.

In regards to Vitali, Lewis was considered the measuring stick for him especially after he dispatched Tyson. Whereas Lewis looked at Klitschko with the same disdain Frazier did Foreman. In other words just a big strong clumsy guy who can't fight nor has he been tested.

Sure, both Lewis and Vitali had been training for a fight at relatively the same time, but they were miles apart in the way they were going about it. In reality, Klitschko hadn't really ever stopped training since he turned pro, whereas Lewis hadn't been near a gym in a year. Klitschko, was still hungry and was fighting to prove himself and to erase the quitter label he'd acquired after his fight with Byrd. In his mind he couldn't slip up and had to be impressive every time out. A contender who has yet to win the title can always fight on short notice easier than an established champion who is unsure of his future.

On the other hand, Lewis perceived Klitschko as a cumbersome non tested cartoon character that quit versus a blown up super-middleweight. Which is the wrong way to approach any fight, especially when you're 38. Lewis accepted Klitschko as a replacement for Johnson without hesitation. He was thinking, I believe, that he'd pull one over on the boxing public, being that most saw Klitschko as his biggest threat and successor. Only he didn't see it that way and thought he'd get over beating a guy who wasn't nearly as good as advertised, and it almost backfired on him.

So the bottom line is going into their fight, Klitschko had the mental and physical advantages. The fact is Lewis wrongly didn't think much of Klitschko, and for Vitali, Lewis represented the king of the hill who he had to knock off. It's also a fact that when a fighter takes another fighter lightly he can't adjust during the fight because the opponent is better than he thought; this was something Ali found out after about the third round with Frazier during their first fight. Ali thought

Lennox Lewis-Vitali Klitschko Revisited

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Saturday, 13 June 2009 19:00

Joe was a walk in can't miss punching bag. When he realized that Joe was really a great fighter and knew how to fight him, it was two months too late.

The Fight And The Aftermath:

For his fight with Vitali Klitschko, Lennox Lewis weighed in at 256 ½, the heaviest of his career. Klitschko weighed in at 248 which was within two pounds of what he was for his fight prior to and next fight after Lewis.

At the bell for round one Lewis and Klitschko both came out pawing with their left jabs strictly looking to set up and land their big right hands. There was a lot of holding and wild swinging during the round, but Vitali was busier and displayed a better punch variation. In the second round Klitschko bounced a perfect right hand off of Lewis's chin that had him hurt and holding on for a moment. Lennox tried to laugh it off but no one was fooled, he was clearly shook. For the remainder of the round Klitschko pot-shotted Lewis, yet Lewis still plugged forward with his hands down as if he didn't believe Vitali could really hurt him.

In the third round Klitschko was again the busier fighter, but Lewis landed the cleaner punches and opened a cut over Klitschko's left eye that worsened as the round progressed. Lewis fought more measured in the fourth round and seemed to make Klitschko throw his punches more with the intent of holding Lewis off than hurting him. By the end of the round both fighters looked dead tired and spent as they hung onto each other waiting for the bell. Throughout the fifth round Klitschko was busier and Lewis was looking to hit the lottery with one big right hand. However, Klitschko's eye cuts were getting worse from the few jabs and grazing rights Lewis landed.

For the first minute of the sixth round Klitschko once again was busier than Lewis, until Lennox landed the best punch of the fight, a right uppercut that shook Vitali for a brief second. That was shortly followed by a clean left hook while Vitali's back was to the ropes. As the round was concluding Klitschko was holding on as Lewis was trying to get room to punch. Right before the bell Lewis scored with another big right uppercut and went back to his corner and sat down hard on his stool.

Shortly after the fight was stopped due to Klitschko's cuts, Klitschko vehemently protested the fight being stopped. At the time of the stoppage all three judges had the fight scored 58-56 Klitschko. At best Klitschko was leading by two, but it could've been just one. Neither fighter had established themselves as being in control. It was close and wasn't exactly the finest hour for either fighter. The best way to put it is there's no case for Lewis being in the lead and there was for Klitschko.

Due to the cuts sustained by Klitschko, the fight being stopped was the right call. It's ridiculous to argue who would've won. Championship fights are scheduled for 12 rounds so the score at the time of the stoppage means nothing. John Tate was leading Mike Weaver after fourteen rounds and had the fight under control. He was knocked out with 45 seconds remaining in the 15th round. So much for leading in the fight.

Lennox Lewis-Vitali Klitschko Revisited

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Saturday, 13 June 2009 19:00

I do know Klitschko hit Lennox with more clean right hands than I've ever seen him hit with before in his career, and he went at Vitali as if he were handcuffed. So either Lewis's chin got better as he aged or Klitschko's punch isn't what we quite thought. And that was an old and terribly out of condition Lewis he was nailing throughout the bout. As far as the cut, it was caused by a punch Lewis threw with intent of doing damage, and it did. The fight continued and the cuts got worse and the fight had to be stopped. That's boxing. Durability is part of what makes a great fighter and as we know, Vitali's body, not his heart, has betrayed him against the two best fighters he's fought, and also in training, leading to many of his fights being postponed or canceled.

In regards to fighting a rematch, I don't buy for a second that Lewis feared Klitschko. He showed beyond a doubt that he wasn't a coward or lacked heart. Many forget that he came back from two devastating knockout defeats that very easily could've ruined him psychologically. And other than him being shook for a second he wasn't close to being in trouble or going out versus Klitschko.

As far as Klitschko, he no doubt wasn't convinced by Lewis that he was the better fighter. On top of that he probably didn't have a morsel of a doubt in his mind that he would've defeated Lennox in a rematch. In the end both fighters did what was best for them. Vitali yelled for a rematch and Lennox didn't want to give him a chance to possibly upset him at a time in his career when he was old and seriously contemplating retirement.

Six years out from the fight we now see how great Lewis was to be able to get a win over a formidable fighter like Klitschko so late in his career. Since fighting Lewis, Klitschko has proved his worth being that he hasn't been defeated and after a 46 month layoff came back and won a piece of the title in his first bout.

Lennox Lewis beat Vitali Klitschko in the final fight of his career. That's inescapable. However, neither fighter conclusively proved they were the better fighter that night. But Lewis won the fight and there's no controversy surrounding it.