

## It'll Take The Right Fighter And Plan To Beat Wladimir Klitschko

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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Tony Galento was gonna go right at Joe Louis and hit him on the chin and knock him out. How'd that work out other than Galento providing Louis a brief scare in the third round? You could list every opponent of Muhammad Ali who challenged him in the sixties and seventies excluding Joe Frazier and George Foreman, who said they were going to cut the ring off on him and prevent him from using his legs to control the fight. Yet only Frazier and Foreman had success nullifying his legs and lateral movement. Both Ali and Jimmy Ellis said repeatedly before fighting Frazier how they weren't going to get trapped in a corner or along the ropes when they fought him, something Ellis was successful at preventing for two rounds and Ali about three or four.

Ken Norton said before fighting Foreman that he was going to box and counter punch him during their fight. A strategy that lasted about a round or until he got hit. Practically every challenger who faced Larry Holmes predicted they were going to get past his jab and rough him up, yet Holmes went on to make more successful title defenses than any other heavyweight champ other than Joe Louis. How many opponents of Mike Tyson were going to box him, then after getting hit they fought to keep from getting stopped instead of winning? Before challenging Lennox Lewis, Tommy Morrison, David Tua and Mike Tyson vowed they'd take the fight to him and knock him out inside the distance. Then resorted to plan B after getting touched a few times on the way in.

The often repeated phrase "they all have a plan until they get hit" was coined by the late Jim Jacobs but got the most play via Mike Tyson. Jacobs also coined the term "he throws punches with bad intentions" while studying films of Joe Frazier prior to his first fight versus Muhammad Ali. The point here is having a strategy or plan sounds great before the fight, but unless you have the right fighter to execute the plan it's really just cookbook analogy. The cookbook recipe may call for a teaspoon of this, a quarter pound of that along with an oven pre-heated at 350 degrees, and the cake should turn out a certain way. Unfortunately, there are no cookbook answers that apply in the ring for all fighters.

Prior to fighting Marvin Hagler, Sugar Ray Leonard picked up on the fact that Hagler wasn't the most effective fighting as the aggressor. In his two previous loses to Bobby Watts and Willie Monroe, Hagler was forced to fight as the attacker for most of the fight, thus he lost by decision to both in their first meeting. After watching Leonard induce Hagler to follow him all over the ring for a majority of the 12-rounds they fought, it's obvious that Hagler was no Joe Frazier at cutting off the ring and Ray knew it. Since that fight I've heard it said to beat Hagler all you have to do is box him instead of bringing the fight to him, which is exactly what a majority of his opponents did. Really, is that all you have to do?

That is the perfect cookbook analogy. Granted, Hagler like many other fighters wasn't at his best when forced to push the fight. That said, how many past or present middleweights were capable of fighting Hagler the way Leonard did/could? So much for the perfect plan. Without the right fighter the perfect strategy and fight plan will explode when the oven is turned up too much.

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Enter Wladimir Klitschko. Since his fight Saturday versus Ruslan Chagaev it's been repeated by boxing fans and media people that Chagaev is terrible and had no heart. Really? What a flawed thought process. So in other words Chagaev didn't want to beat the perceived best fighter in the heavyweight division and fight for millions of dollars in his next fight. Maybe Chagaev never saw Klitschko fight before and didn't know what he was facing? Not likely. Prior to challenging Wladimir Klitschko, Ruslan Chagaev saw every title defense he made, heard every commentator and fan echo how Klitschko fights scared and fears taking a big shot on the chin. Therefore, just go get him, that's what the cookbook calls for.

This may not be a revelation to some, but once a fighter gets hit cleanly by his opponent everything changes. Sometimes it doesn't have to be clean, it could just be a grazing shot, but fighters still know. For some reason the recent challengers who have faced Wladimir Klitschko decided not to go after him once they're in front of him. Could it be that they're all heartless and gutless, and that after taking punches and training hard for years they suddenly decide they don't want to become the heavyweight boxing champion? Do they all stink? How come they don't shut down against most of the other fighters they fight? What is it about Wladimir Klitschko that makes most of his challengers chose not to fight him?

Perhaps, it's the same thing that happened to Morrison, Tua and Tyson when they fought Lennox Lewis. Maybe after being touched by him a few times they realize not only can he hurt them, but they can be humiliated and embarrassed in the process, which discouraged them to really push and engage him. This is something that's been a common theme during Klitschko's recent title defenses. In other words, once they feel his jab and sense they can't time when his right hand is coming, they chose to adapt the mindset maybe he'll make a mistake and I'll catch him good, as opposed to going out and taking their own liberty with him.

The reality is Wladimir Klitschko's first priority is to keep his opponent from tagging him with anything big. To achieve that he uses his long and powerful left jab to impose himself physically on them. His physical stature regarding his height and reach makes him hard to get to. The fact that he doesn't willingly mix it up inducing open exchanges makes it harder to get to him. With him controlling the pace and distance he forces his opponent to have to come out of themselves with the hope of disrupting him and causing him to panic. The risk in doing that is they're being forced to guess and fight blindly, whereas he is seeing everything and can make them pay for missing or being out of position.

The other thing he has going for him is there isn't one active heavyweight fighter who brings multiple things to the ring that can force him to adjust. If he's facing another fighter who can punch like Hasim Rahman or Lamon Brewster, they don't have the means to deliver their power without getting beat up in the process. Other fighters who can box a little don't have the punch to worry him or shake him up even if they can score.

His size and power are enough to cause any fighter real problems, but the fact that he fights a safety-first style compounds it. He induces a slow pace that automatically has him in position to where he sees everything that's going on and can adjust to it before it's too late. He'd actually be easier to beat if he wasn't worried about his chin because he'd engage more and be open to get nailed much harder than he has been in his last few title defenses.

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In order to go after him, it's gonna take a fighter who has Holyfield/Frazier type courage and accepts they're going to get hit and it's going to be painful. And that fighter better take a good punch and be able to deliver one of his own. He has to be willing to get knocked out going for the knockout. The best plan strategically isn't enough to beat the current version of Wladimir Klitschko that we've recently seen.

No, it's gonna take the right plan along with the right fighter to execute it. There's only one problem with that, there just aren't many of those fighters around, if any. It's not that every heavyweight out there today stinks, it's more a case of him being a handful physically and strategically than anything else. Which isn't the same as saying he's an all-time great. It's more of him being great at using and applying what tools he does have at his disposal.