

Klitschko-Arreola Overshadowed By Mayweather-Marquez

Written by Michael Woods

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Not that it would be the talk of the town anyway, but the heavyweight title fight unfolding on Sept. 26, pitting Vitali Klitschko against prospect Cris Arreola, has been lost in the shuffle of the Sept. 19 Floyd Mayweather-Juan Manuel Marquez bout. HBO has put a monstrous marketing push into Mayweather's return from a two-year hiatus, in a bid to firmly establish him as Oscar De La Hoya's pay-per-view heir apparent. The push for the Klitschko-Arreola has been minimal, and with neither man standing out as a top-flight marketer, and with neither man admitting that they indulge in urinotherapy, it's apparent that fight fans aren't ready to shift attention to the heavyweights until after they see how Mayweather performs. Even then, a portion of pug followers will transfer their focus to the Nov. 14 Manny Pacquiao-Miguel Cotto faceoff.

Honestly, what if the 38-year-old Vitali (37-2, 36 KOs) and the 28-year-old Arreola (27-0, 24 KOs) had the date all to themselves, and weren't overshadowed by the Mayweather blitz? Would there be a vastly different aura surrounding the Staples Center tussle between WBC champ Klitschko, a transplanted Californian, and Cali native Arreola? Well, certainly there would be more buzz, and more chatter about Arreola's chances of staying unbeaten after taking on a man far, far 'n away more talented and experienced than he's had the occasion to test himself against. My opinion is that Arreola is in for a rude awakening, and will discover within the first three rounds that the best competition he's met to this point (Chazz Witherspoon last summer and playing-out-the-string Jameel McCline in April) are minor league talents compared to the robotic-in-a-good way Vitali. If Mayweather weren't making news, with gunplay, and beefs with bill collectors, then more fight fans would've spent a bit more time plumbing into Arreola's physique, and his psyche. He was up around three bills less than two months ago, and didn't shed weight once he stepped in for "Klitschko Dodger" David Haye with the urgency that some would expect and hope for.

Amateur shrinks—and aren't we all, much of the time—would argue that Arreola has a subconscious will to fail, that by refusing to drop down his BMI, he's building impediments to success. Why wouldn't a supposedly world class athlete tweak their eating and training habits so that they'd enter the ring at a weight which their training, management and promotional teams feel is an optimum one? Perhaps it's a fear of success?

Vitali Klitschko, on a Tuesday conference call to discuss the scrap, which will play on HBO, has proven that he's willing to give himself the best chance at winning, from a training standpoint, as he goes toward his fourth WBC title defense. He said he's looking forward to fighting in the States and Cali again; he is 1-1 in Staples, with a 2003 loss to Lennox Lewis and a 2004 win against Corrie Sanders on his resume.

"Everyone will be surprised, my performance will be much better than before," he said.

Klitschko's last live action came on March 21 against Juan Carlos Gomez in Germany. That

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was a workmanlike outing, a Klitschko special really, with tons of jabbing, and waiting for the right time to do the right thing, and grabbing, but it didn't do anything to move the dial on the interest meter regarding the heavies. David Haye's taunting campaign did move the dial, but most folks dismissed him as a fraud or a wuss, rightly or wrongly, after he cried injury and pulled out of his scheduled match with Wladimir in early June. He then flirted with Vitali, but ditched him at the altar, choosing instead to dance with gargantuan but immobile Nicolay Valuev. On Tuesday, Vitali told media that he'd like to make Haye pay down the line sometime, but was not interested in wasting time on the Brit.

"He's a serious fighter but not a serious person," Vitali said of Haye.

Vitali talked up Arreola, perhaps a bit more than the relatively untested hitter deserves. Is he talking up the promotion, looking to fill remaining seats, or making sure he doesn't focus on Arreola's recent history of coming in to important bouts like he was training to secure a Pillsbury endorsement. "Strong," he called Arreola, and "explosive" with his combinations. He says Arreola has all the ingredient to be a champion, in fact. I'd say the jury will be deliberating on that contention through the Sept. 26 clash, and right now, many jurists have grave doubts, because of that poundage issue.

For the record, it isn't the physique that concerns. It's the pounds, period. Who can argue that Arreola, and Sam Peter, and James Toney, and all the other heavy-duty chowhounds wouldn't be better served by trimming the midsection, to aid their mobility and stamina?

Hey, maybe Vitali's age "edge" will bite him on Sept. 26, and render the weight issue moot. He admitted that for every athlete, "time is the biggest enemy," and we would have to see if he looks old or spry on fight night. "Let's see and compare," he said, "28-years-old Arreola and 38-years-old Klitschko?" That doesn't mean he's giving Arreola a shot to beat him, as he said his bro Wlad is the only guy on the horizon who might be able to better him.

As stated prior, there have been no Marquez-drinking-a-yellow-liquid-that-is-not Gatorade-moments as we build to the Staples title collision, but some humor did sneak in to the Tuesday call. A pressman asked if it was advantageous to have coach Fritz Sdunek living with him in his LA residence. "We live in the same building but not the same sleeping room," Vitali explained. "There's enough bedrooms there." Just in case anyone was preparing an allegation that Vitali and Sdunek have been canoodling...

Klitschko also told us that his kids, age 9, 7 and 4, haven't seen him fight in person or on tape, even, and that he wants to shield them from ring violence. I'm of the mind that they could tune in to HBO on Sept. 26, and wouldn't be in danger of seeing their pop toppled, and suffering mental trauma as a result. Prediction: Vitali Klitschko winner by TKO, round six.