Written by Rick Folstad
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Tuck your chin in, Cristobal Arreola. Keep it nestled behind your shoulder or hidden behind your fists, some place safe and warm. Protect it like you‘d protect grandma's fine china. If it cracks, it’ll break her heart and yours.

Vitali Klitschko is one of the better chin hunters in the world. He stalks opponents, moves in and then strikes out like a guy trying to swipe his hat back from someone who grabbed it off his head and then waved it in front of him. He throws a long, fairly quick, tricky punch and when it lands cleanly, chins and careers shatter.

Don’t ever grab his hat.

Of course, Arreola has damaged a few promising careers himself. He’s 27-0 with 24 KOs, though two of the three guys he didn’t stop were disqualified, escaping a knockout loss by breaking the rules.

Arreola and Klitschko (37-2, 36 KOs) face each other on Sept. 26 at the STAPLES Center in Los Angeles for Klitschko‘s WBC heavyweight title (HBO). The fight is scheduled for 12 rounds, but that’s just a technicality. That‘s probably five or six more rounds than they’ll need.

“I’ve always wanted the green belt,” Arreola said on a recent conference call, referring to the WBC title. “That’s what I’ve always shot for.”

Though he was born in Los Angeles, if Arreola wins, he‘ll be the first boxer of Mexican descent to win a heavyweight championship. And like the rest of us, he doesn’t see this fight going all 12 rounds.

“It’s always in my game plan to go 12 rounds,” he said. “Everyone expects a KO and so do I. But I have to train for a 12-round fight. I‘m pretty confident I can take a punch.”

Expect an early night. The only way this fight goes the distance is if they put pillows on instead of gloves.

If this were a bar fight, you’d pick Klitschko to win by manslaughter. He’s bigger and built better and he just looks like a guy who could tear your head off if he had the inkling, though he doesn’t have a reputation for being a thug.

Arreola looks like he could be your plumber. He‘s not cut from granite and he never worked at Chippendale’s. You look at him and wonder why the heck he picked a fight with the Terminator.

“I’m not one of those body-building guys,“ he said. “But boxing is not a body-building sport. I don’t look like Adonis. You look at me and it’s like I just got off the field from picking oranges.“

What was the hardest thing he gave up to get his weight down and to get in shape?

“The main thing I cut off was beer,“ he said. “Now I’m eating right. Chicken, greens, fish. I feel good right now.“

Bet a cold one would go down pretty easy.

How do you not cheer for a guy like that? He wouldn’t even poke fun at his opponent, saying he was very impressed with how Klitschko has dominated the fighters he’s faced since coming back from a four-year layoff.

He didn’t even take a shot at Eddie Chambers, the other American heavyweight contender everyone in the fight game is talking about.

“My respects go out to him,” he said.

At 38, Kitschko - who also calls LA home - is 10 years older than Arreola, which doesn’t mean a thing. Heavyweight fighters seem to have a longer shelf life than guys in the smaller weight classes. Maybe that‘s because one of the last things to leave a fighter is his punching power. His quickness, reflexes and stamina are always first to leave. They skip town long before his power does.

Punching power likes to hang around old fighters, especially old heavyweights. Power was the only intangible still hanging around George Foreman back in 1994 when he won the heavyweight championship at the age of 45. You remember that right hand. Came out of nowhere in the tenth. Traveled about six inches. Took away Michael Moorer’s dreams and title.

For the first 28 minutes of that fight, Moorer ran circles around the slower, older, plodding Foreman. But Foreman’s right hand was always cocked and Moorer kept dancing in front of it and then slipping away, a foolish dog chasing a slow truck.

When Foreman finally pulled the trigger, the right hand landed. One moment Foreman is an old, sad, beaten 45-year-old, the next moment he’s heavyweight champion of the world.

That’s why we like knockout artists. They’re never completely out of a fight until the final bell.

Just don’t expect to hear it ring on the 26th.