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A moment after Arthur Abraham knocked Jermain Taylor out cold to inaugurate Showtime's Super Six, the tournament set up to determine the best super middleweight in the world, the camera cut to a reaction shot by tourney contestant Mikkel Kessler. He was smiling during an exchange with someone just out of camera range. He made a face, and mimed a kind of "boom" detonation. It was funny. Abraham and the knockout had impressed him, but you could tell it hadn't frightened him.

Kessler's a refreshing character——a smart, telegenic guy who happens to like to fight and who has an aptitude for it. He's a natural athlete and a very big, strong super middleweight. But he's relatively inexperienced against world class competition. This came to light clearly in 2007 when he was thoroughly schooled by Joe Calzaghe in their unification match. It's hard to know for sure how significant this fact is. However, there are certainly no Joe Calzaghes to worry about among the Super Six.

But there's the question of how Kessler deals with a busy opponent who doesn't allow him to do what he wants. As everyone saw, he did come slightly undone when confronted by Calzaghe's sporadic aggression. Kessler fights "correctly" in a rather European manner, operating behind a steady jab. He favors straight punches, and throws one-twos frequently. When the opportunity is there, he can put four and five punch combinations together convincingly. He's a good, but not great, puncher.

Kessler is not stiff exactly, but neither is he fluid. I've observed that if his opponent is throwing a lot of shots, Mikkel has to take a moment to reset. He becomes slightly flustered. It's not a monumental error, but it puts him at a disadvantage with mobile, active guys. He also works out of a stance that is a bit wider than the ideal. And nobody has taught him to punch to the body.

At this point, Kessler, along with undefeated Andre Ward who'll he'll fight on November 21st, are the two remaining fighters to yet appear in the tournament (although Allan Green apparently will be entering as a replacement for Jermain Taylor.) Because he has been seen seldom by US audiences, it's possible that Kessler is being somewhat overlooked here in the States.

He does a couple of things that make him worth taking a serious look at. His focus is extremely good. There are no lapses in concentration. Against Calzaghe, he figured out fairly early that he was being outskilled and would lose, but one got the sense that he decided on the spot to view the experience as part of his education. Ordinarily, Kessler's a fighter who assumes the role as the predator when he fights, and if he hurts you, he finishes you.

At this point, it's between he and Arthur Abraham as to who's the favorite to win the tournament. With the Super Six already slotted in, Kessler wisely took a tune-up against Gusmyr Perdomo in September (he'd been off nearly a year.) Perdomo gave Mikkel four good rounds of work, which no doubt sharpened him up for the tournament. It's a good sign when a fighter is willing to take a calculated risk in anticipation of a greater reward.

Regarding prospective opponents, I don't see Kessler having any trouble with the talented but insecure Allan Green, who will be too timid to assert himself. And with Carl Froch's inept showing against Andre Dirrell, it's hard to picture Kessler not picking up an easy win there too.

That leaves Andre Ward, Andre Dirrell, and fellow betting favorite Arthur Abraham.

Both Ward and Dirrell are quick handed, quick footed guys who like to switch between orthodox and southpaw stances. Kessler will be at a speed disadvantage against each of them. He'll need to slow them to a walk before he can impose his will on them. However, here's where his lack of body punching may cost him. Against Perdomo, Jimmy Montoya was in Kessler's corner. Jimmy knows something about body punching. Maybe he should plant the idea in the fighter's head. Somebody better--not knowing will catch up with him one of these days.

Kessler against Abraham ought to be very interesting. It took Abraham virtually the whole fight to finally catch up to Jermain Taylor. Kessler is a tougher and more confident guy. And he's got an infinitely better chin than Taylor. Will Abraham's slow pace and limited punch output prevent him from winning a decision, assuming his power won't get Kessler out of there?

One last thing is worth considering. Not one of the participants in the Super Six is versatile. Each has something that he does exclusively, and that's it. As they say in the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king, and Mikkel Kessler may be the most versatile of a limited lot.

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