

Too Tough To Call: Carl Froch Versus Mikkel Kessler on Showtime

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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It's possible that until his substandard but eye opening one-sided decision loss of the WBA super middleweight title to Andre Ward last November as part of Super Six Classic, Mikkel Kessler (42-2, 32 kayos) would have been favored to beat WBC champ Carl Froch this coming Saturday night in the next round of the Showtime super middleweight tournament.

But it's hard to put that loss out of mind. For one thing, Kessler got roughed up by a guy who's not known as a rough guy. He spent a lot of the fight complaining to the referee, and actually seemed on the verge of quitting a couple of times. In the undefeated Carl Froch (26-0, 20 kayos), he's facing a supremely confident guy who actively looks for an aggressive, no holds barred kind of fight. If Ward could completely throw Kessler off his game, what will happen to him when he meets a genuine bully?

You'd think the answer to that one would be obvious. In light of his defeat of Andre Dirrell, who went on to easily beat the tournament's previous slight favorite, Arthur Abraham, Carl Froch must be among the odds-on favorites to walk away the tournament winner.

This is a styles make fights fight though, and there are a number of factors worth checking out before coming to any conclusions.

Even though Froch beat Dirrell in his last appearance and knocked out Jermain Taylor in his fight before that, he didn't look like anything close to a world beater either time. His win over Taylor came as the result of a lottery punch punch landed seconds before the final bell in a fight he was losing. Since Taylor, it's now clear, is very susceptible to one punch knockout losses, maybe this win wasn't such a major accomplishment. And, in beating Dirrell, all that can be said about him was that he didn't look as bad as Dirrell.

Carl is essentially no more than a slow, rugged guy who likes to make the fight. He has no great punch and he's not much of a boxer. He moves forward, his left hand down at his side, and looks for openings; he doesn't really create them for himself. He rushes in and he loops his punches. He can be feinted out of position fairly easily. I noticed during his fight with Dirrell that, surprisingly, these feints often caused him to flinch. Taylor had him on the deck; there's no reason to believe that Kessler isn't capable of putting him there too.

Mikkel Kessler is the faster, more athletic boxer of the two. He's the more technically sound too, and the bigger puncher. He's got faster hands and feet. And, if someone tips him off, he'll be able to land his very good right hand almost at will over Froch's low left. But it's unlikely he'll do that on his own, and that's one of his liabilities: he's not capable of altering what he does based on the situation he finds himself in. And what he does is very predictable. He'll jab or double jab, and follow with a straight right hand. He virtually never throws a punch to the body.

Both Froch and Kessler built their reputations beating solid, but unspectacular opposition. Froch's opponents were mostly European, both Eastern and Western, while Kessler's ranged

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from somewhat further afield, having had a few Americans brought in to fatten up his resume. Both benefited from fighting in friendly home environments.

Saturday night, Kessler keeps the home court advantage. He'll need it. I think that fighting Ward in Oakland unsettled him once things started not going his way. He was used to getting support from the referee, but turned whiny when that advantage was withdrawn. Maybe that sympathy will be returned to him now that he's home again. And, against Froch, a sympathetic ref could make a big difference.

There may be some intangibles in play here that must be taken into account. Froch could have the psychological advantage of having beating the guy who handled the previously undefeated Abraham. Kessler was soundly defeated his last time out. This isn't ancient history with either fighter. There's no way to know how - or if, this will factor into what each fighter brings to the ring with him.

On paper, this one should be easy. Mikkel Kessler, with his faster hands, better technique, more power, and a powerful overhand right perfectly suited to nailing this particular opponent, ought to be able to catch Carl Froch all night long, and maybe even knock him out. He's also got the benefit of fighting at home in front of an aggressively supportive audience. But the results of a fight often don't come down to what's on paper. And, with Kessler's coming off a bad loss, coming into a fight where self-confidence may play an enormous role, anything can happen.

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