

## Here Come The Brits

Written by George Kimball  
Monday, 06 September 2010 19:00

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Don't get me wrong here. It's actually refreshing to see Showtime going global with its ShoBox telecasts, and the transatlantic tape-delay of Mick Hennessey's card from York Hall this week may even be an improvement on what American audiences have been seeing on Friday nights of late.

And since neither main event performer would be familiar to US TV audiences, you can't really blame Showtime's publicists for that fanciful press release they circulated among American media outlets a few days ago extolling Tyson Fury and John O'Donnell as budding "global superstars with "the ability to one day win a world championship.

As one who's seen both in action I would but wonder: Exactly what world would that be?

The danger with disseminating misinformation like this is that it's often going to wind up appearing, unchallenged, on any number of American websites – which is exactly what did happen – and then when your budding 'champions' are revealed to be a couple of guys who can barely hold their hands up, everybody winds up looking pretty silly.

The release touting the principal performers on Friday night's show offers the testimony of more than half a dozen British fight scribes – who, as a class, have never been noted for their objectivity when it comes to their own. (Some of the lads may have actually seen Fury and O'Donnell in action, which might make their testimony even more unreliable.) Remember, we're talking here about a group of people who a decade ago would have been pretty much unanimous in affirming their conviction that Naseem Hamed was about to give Sugar Ray Robinson a run for his money as the greatest boxer ever to don gloves.

So who are these guys Fury and O'Donnell?

Fury, the 11-0 heavyweight from Manchester, is described as "a 6-foot-9 knockout artist from Manchester, dimensions which suggest that, among other things, he has grown two inches in the year since I saw him fight.

Steve Bunce, perhaps the most knowledgeable fight scribe in Britain, says he was "having a bit of fun when he described Fury, for the benefit of prospective Showtime viewers, as "the white Larry Holmes.

In a fight between the two I'd make Holmes only a slight favorite. After all, Larry is 61 years old.

Fury might have more accurately been described as a younger and slightly more ponderous version of Kevin McBride, whose dimensions he almost precisely duplicates.

Buncey wasn't joking, on the other hand, when he noted that "there are promoters all over the world praying each morning that a Tyson Fury walks in off the street, and in that respect he is

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absolutely correct. A visit from six-foot-seven-inch heavyweight who could walk through the door without tripping over himself would be grounds for celebration in the office of in pretty much any fight promoter I can think of.

In September of 2009 Fury crossed the Irish Sea to fight on the undercard of Brian Peters' Poonsawat-Dunne show at the O2 Arena in Dublin. As I noted at the time, Tyson was "descended from Irish traveler stock, and claims a distant kinship with Limericks Andy Lee. This would presumably make him related as well to Irelands Prince of Pipers, Finbar Furey, and his son Martin. (Of the High Kings, who in addition to providing the big mans entrance music, performed the Irish national anthem prior to the main event.)

His side of the family never could spell, said Finbar Furey of Tyson Fury.

On the night in question Fury was matched in a six-round prelim against a Czech heavyweight named Tomas Mrazek. Now, I have enough respect for anyone willing to lace on gloves and endure combat that I rarely describe any boxer as a bum, but if Mrazek could speak English his first sentence would be something along the line of "a bum, which is what I am, let's face it.

Mrazek was 4-22-5 at the time (he has since lost seven more on the trot). Three of his four career wins had come against other Czech heavyweights.

In Dublin that night Fury, the alleged "knockout artist, won a 60-57 points decision. Although he finally did knock Mrazek down with half a minute left in the fight, referee Emil Teidt, the lone scoring official, could bring himself to award Fury no more than three (or possibly two, if the sixth was a two-pointer) rounds.

Whether they were scared off by Fury's reputation or by the size of the purses they were offered, two prospective American foes have already dropped out of the opponent's role Friday night. Latest word is that Fury will now face another unbeaten heavyweight, 12-0 Rich Power of Keego Harbor, Michigan. Power did score a third-round TKO of Ray Lopez on the Dirrell-Abraham card in Detroit last March, after being decked in the first round by a guy in his second pro fight.

Mick Hennessy was there and he still made this match?

O'Donnell was born in Galway but is domiciled in England. In addition to predictions of imminent titlehood, the collection of raves from across the pond includes comparisons to Paul Williams and Ricky Hatton.

O'Donnell is not a complete stranger to stateside boxing fans. His prior experience consists of the four minutes and thirty seconds he lasted before being beaten into submission by Mexican journeyman Christian Solano on the Mayweather-De La Hoya undercard at the MGM Grand three years ago.

That he lost his only American fight is less instructive than who he lost it to. Solano was at the time 19-11-4, coming off three straight losses, and lost three more in a row afterward. In eleven

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fights since meeting O'Donnell he has gone 2-8, along with a no-decision in a 2008 bout in Mexico that was suspended by the referee after eight rounds "for lack of contest.

Before the first round was over Solano had put O'Donnell on the floor, and then in the second the Mexican caught him with a big left hook and put him down again. He made it up, but was so wobbly that Joe Cortez stopped it at 1:50 of the second.

You sure we're talking about the same Paul Williams, Jeff?

Showtime's – or to be fair, Hennessy's – release also notes that O'Donnell "will face his toughest opponent to date in Terrence Cauthen. No disrespect at all to Cauthen, but at 35 Terrance has three wins in his last seven fights, and if he's the toughest opponent for a guy in his 25th pro fight, what does that say about the first 24?

Now, I suppose it's possible that by the most unlikely set of coincidences I happened to catch both Fury and O'Donnell on the worst nights of their respective careers, meaning that I'm wrong about all of this and the Brits are right. I guess we'll find out Friday night.