

Going The Distance, Down The Sinful Mile

Written by Phil Woolever
Monday, 11 October 2010 19:00

I might have been born in Liverpool, but I grew up in Hamburg

---**John Lennon**

ALONG THE REEPERBAHN, HAMBURG- Some might say that since boxing is known as the red-light district of sports, sweet scientists should find themselves quite at home for the Vitali Klitschko-Shannon Briggs affair near Europe's largest red light district itself.

Hamburg is a high-finance harbor where privilege and perversion have intersected like the fast flowing Alster and Elbe rivers more than once or twice. In the colorful St. Pauli district the Reeperbahn, or Sinful Mile (Der Sundige Meile) is a heralded trail of funky bars, sex shops and many strange, questionable encounters.

Since returning from a four year layoff in the winter of 2008, 39 year old Klitschko has heard his heavyweight campaign criticized as yet another sinful, slugging trek through the scum land of present day heavyweight boxing.

Many critics consider Briggs latest opportunity an obscenity in itself, proclaiming the 38 year old barnstormer unworthy.

Here, no stones are cast. Fate, the grand hustler, smiles many ways.

Photogenic and physically imposing Briggs, 51-5-1 (45), hyped enough threats and provided enough hoopla to help make another successful, blueprint promotion for the Klitschko brothers K2 company. Either Klitschko may be able to carry a huge boxing event by themselves around here, but it doesn't hurt if there's an interesting looking opponent to put on the poster.

Hamburg is listed by many tourism touts as one of the hottest global party spots, and the exceptionally scenic international port has maintained a profitable profile amidst heaping helpings of old money and new euros. Many doses of disposable income will be spent this weekend in the suburban stretches of the Altona zone, where O2 World arena hosts Klitschkos WBC heavyweight title defense against resilient recycled challenger Briggs.

It will be a big surprise if Briggs can make a two-way rumble out of the bout, while the told ya they're bums chorus will resume should Klitschko fail to drop him hard. If the North American challenger takes the belt back to Brooklyn it would probably be boxing's upset of the year.

I won't make the mistake of taking Briggs lightly, promised Klitschko with a serious, shadowed game face on. He is a former champion capable of giving a very tough fight. I have prepared for that whether I get the chance I hope for to stop him early or if I must box for 12 rounds. Either way, I am ready for whatever challenge he presents and I will show I deserve to hold the same title as many other great fighters.

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Im going to knock the ignorance out of him, mocked Briggs, playing off his recent theme accusing Klitschko of insulting his asthmatic condition. This has been my best training camp ever. Right after I beat Vitali they can bring on Wladimir.

There did not seem to be any deep resentments as the pair posed closely for publicity shots. Whatever his prior uneven motivation or current ability level, Briggs is often a top quality pro. Not many boxers have faced George Foreman, Lennox Lewis, and Ray Mercer. Add Klitschkos name to the list and Briggs has quite a resume.

Briggs is persistent. If hes persistent enough with the all out assault hes bragging about, we could have a fine Saturday night. Thats something like a one-in-five chance. Whatever happens inside the strands, the Klitschko road show should play well again as the K2 principals wind down a busy 2010 season in which each brother scheduled three appearances. So far theyre 4 for 4 in KO attempts, not the worst marketing strategy.

A few days before the contest around 500 or so of the 16,000 general seats remained available. Briggs probably flexed his muscles and showed his goldendreads more than enough at Mondays final press conference to propel the walk up gate into sold out status. A public workout Wednesday about 48 hours before the weigh-in provided a free opportunity for photo ops and the chance to glimpse both fighters inside a ring.

Imprecise percentage probabilities for the fight shape up something like this :

50% probability: Briggs stands firm behind a burly cross armed defense until Klitschko, in less than two frames, adjusts his looping leather lead to catch Briggs along the ear, triceps and ever popular kidney borderland. Briggs huffs and puffs and doesnt go anywhere for five or six rounds, but he doesnt throw any punches back either as the usually polite crowd jeers. Klitschko occasionally clobbers him with a right, but Briggs absorbs punches without wear or wobbling. It drags on and on. Klitschko wins 120-108 on all cards.

25% : Briggs misses with occasional hooks while Klitschko grazes him with pawing probes over and under, fired from knee and shoulder level. As the 2nd round winds down, Klitschko lands an overhand right. By the time Briggs lands a decent counter he needs a knockout to win, and seems to be waiting for a repeat of his last second win over Sergi Liakovich. Klitschko wears him down at the stretch and scores a debatable TKO going into the final frames, with Briggs holding on but not in serious trouble.

10% : Briggs shows more steam than he has in over a decade and gets the crowd screaming as he reddens Klitschkos face and nicks his left eye. Still, Klitschkos jab has the challenger blinking in pain as they trade bombs inside. Klitschko throws awkwardly leveraged uppercuts, with his elbows locked straight, and Briggs starts to implode as he eats the stiff slaps again and again. He is stumbling drunk like a hoochier, harbor side tourist dancing the sailor time shuffle when either his corner or the ref waves it off.

10% (numbers based solely on hopeful optimism): The bell. They charge, both throwing everything theyve got. Both land. Both drop. One doesnt beat the count. Pick em.

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5%: Briggs lands a straight cross or uppercut between Vitalis gloves and busts the champions lip. Kliitschko hesitates to regroup, but Briggs jumps on him like a rhinoceros going after treed booty. Five clubbing right hands later the referee steps in with Klitschko slumped semi-consciously across the strands before a previously rocking arena stunned into silence.

At repeated points during prefight interviews Briggs said almost the exact same thing almost every fighter facing either Klitschko has echoed for years now, just before they get harshly pounded around the ring and into the loss column.

I won't be afraid like the others. I'll keep bringing the fight to him.

Briggs may still have one punch KO power, but against Klitschko he has to land that big punch clean for it to matter.

Big punch or not, the faded Briggs isn't as formidable as Klitschko's other foes during this recent run. Unless the sometimes wacky Briggs can make something crazy occur, count on seeing belted big boy business as usual while Klitschko hammers out a monotonous victory.

The most intrigue will probably involve whether or not Klitschko can join Lennox Lewis (TKO 5 in 1998) and Darroll Wilson (TKO 3 in 96) as the only men to knock the talkative, tank-like Briggs out.

Statistically, Klitschko should scuff and lump Briggs up enough to notch another TKO around the 9th or 10th round. Stats can lie more than dance hall girls.

If Briggs fights hard and comes up short, it's no fistic sin.

If he takes a couple shots then trespasses into meek submission like most recent challengers, he's just another cheap hooker.

Any port in a slugging storm, the saying goes.