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Arthur Abraham exudes confidence. Why shouldn't he? He's never lost a fight in his life. He's also a really patient guy, often allowing six rounds or more to go by in his fights before really starting to apply pressure. Even once he does, it's a unique kind of unhurried pressure. It doesn't look like he's doing much. A thud here, a club there, all carefully placed. This is a strategy that obviously will work fine on aggressive guys, on punchers, or on anyone who thinks they can match strength with him. So far, it's even worked on opponents who were doing well against him, and then decided to push their luck by testing him. It's even worked on the opponents who've just tried to outslick him.

The Showtime's Super Six World Boxing Classic, constructed to ultimately determine the best super middleweight in the world (although, clearly, without the inclusion of Lucien Bute, failing in its purpose) has essentially pitted three American fighters (Dirrell, Andre Ward, and the recently departed Jermain Taylor) who are blessed with athleticism against three Europeans (Abraham, Carl Froch, and Mikkel Kessler) whose assets are more boxing-specific.

I've always felt that general athleticism as it applies to boxing is an overrated attribute, much as weightlifting strength is. Boxing is boxing; there is no sport that's really similar to it. Athleticism is only a small component of real boxing aptitude. Since so much about being a good fighter is counter-intuitive, athleticism can be, at worst, a double edged sword. A lot of good natural athletes are poor natural fighters because, under pressure, their first impulse runs opposite to what it should. When pushed, Andre Dirrell has a tendency to do the opposite of what he should.

This is a long winded way of saying that, in Abraham versus Dirrell, we have a born fighter taking on a natural athlete. Abraham's ultimate goal is to fight you, betting that he'll be the guy left standing once the dust clears. Dirrell is more focused on using his legs, upper body movement, and hand speed in combination, so that you'll come after him, miss him as he dodges your punches, and allow him to retaliate with quick, although not powerful, shots from his right jab or sneaky left lead.

Andre Dirrell has a style that can, and probably will, make Arthur Abraham look really bad. But for how long?

In his first Super Six fight, Dirrell lost a split decision to the unimpressive Carl Froch. It was Dirrell's fight to win, always within easy reach, but he never bothered to take it. What I saw was a club fighter, in Froch, aimlessly pursuing a guy who had all kinds of natural skills but almost no sense of how to combine those skills to form a cohesive fight. It was a lousy showing. I'm not sure who won or lost, but it didn't break my heart that Dirrell didn't get the nod.

It's interesting to compare Dirrell's showing with Froch against Andre Ward's versus Mikkel Kessler. Both Andres have things in common: good movement, slickness, hand speed, and tremendous hand/eye coordination. They're the same age, the same approximate size, and

they're close in professional experience. But, in terms of how to use what they have, they're worlds apart. I considered Kessler a more dangerous opponent than Froch (although Mikkel's loss to Ward may serve to erode his confidence), and Andre Ward, by the halfway point in their fight, had strategically reduced him to a whining victim who kept looking to the ref for help. Andre Dirrell wouldn't have been capable of doing that.

And although Abraham doesn't come at you as aggressively as Carl Froch, he does so more relentlessly, with a much more developed sense of purpose, and with vastly superior weapons. Froch, for all his bluster, never really made the decision in the Dirrell fight to say, "The hell with this, I'm going in. This guy can't hurt me." Appearing to go in and actually going in are two very different things.

Dirrell won't get this kind of courtesy from Abraham. Once Abraham decides that the time is right, he is going in.

So here is the question the fight comes down to: If Dirrell scoops up the first bunch of rounds while Abraham gets a look at him, will there be enough remaining rounds for Abraham to get the decision if he doesn't manage to catch and stop Andre?

I like Abraham a lot, but he plays a risky game by being so patient. His kayo of Jermain Taylor was really impressive because he seemed to know exactly how much to pour it on and precisely when to do it. But Jermain Taylor will fight you.

At this point, I'd unreservedly pick Abraham to beat both Froch and Kessler. I confess to having underestimated Andre Ward. I'd lean toward Abraham in that fight, but I wouldn't bet on it.

But Andre Dirrell isn't the equal of Andre Ward. Under pressure, I don't think he'll fight back well. And he doesn't possess the ring smarts to counterpunch effectively once Abraham goes into full search and destroy mode. Ultimately, I think that Arthur Abraham will either dominate the second half of the fight enough to score a close, but unambiguous unanimous decision, or he'll catch up to Andre Dirrell very late in the fight, forcing a stoppage.

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