Written by Frank Lotierzo
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This past June 21, Vitali Klitschko fought heavyweight champ Lennox Lewis. Klitschko lost the fight when the ring doctor stopped the fight between the sixth and seventh rounds due to a severe eye cut. When the fight was stopped, Klitschko was leading on all three official scorecards. The Lewis fight can be viewed as the official arrival of Vitali Klitschko to be taken seriously as a heavyweight title challenger.

In the Lewis fight, with his gallant showing, Vitali erased the stench of his loss to IBF heavyweight champ Chris Byrd a few years back. After losing to Byrd, many questioned Klitschko's heart and character due to his suffering a shoulder injury during the bout and then requesting it to be halted. His showing against Lewis proved all those who questioned his manhood and character wrong. Lewis-Klitschko, although sloppy with many lulls in the action, was still a battle of attrition. Both fighters showed championship caliber courage in the bout.

It's been two months since the fight and Klitschko has been given the green light by the doctors to go ahead and fight again this year. Lewis has announced that he definitely will not fight again this year, if ever again. With Lewis unsure of his plans, this could be an indication that he's leaning towards retiring. That's a decision only he can or should make.

With the impending retirement of Lewis, Vitali Klitschko has to be the heavyweight who is viewed as the hottest fighter in the division. I believe most boxing fans want to see him fight again based on his showing against Lewis. Klitschko showed he has a good chin, punching power, and some boxing ability. No, he's not going to make anybody forget Holmes, but he has some basics.

Its been reported that he has agreed to fight on his network, HBO, on December 6 versus an opponent to be named later. An opponent to be named later? Herein lies the problem. Now, I'm not picking on Vitali. He certainly is not the only fighter who has done this, and he definitely won't be the last. The problem I have is that I know what "an opponent to be named later" means, as do most boxing fans, I'm assuming. "An opponent to be named later" means that the next time we see Klitschko in the ring it will be against a fighter who has virtually no shot to beat him. Again, I'm not taking a shot at Vitali Klitschko; mostly all of today's fighters follow the same script.

I also can't let HBO off the hook because they will have final say in accepting or rejecting the opponent. Oh, but they don't act as a promoter or matchmaker? Rest assured that HBO will want an opponent with some name recognition, who will put up a decent fight and give them some rounds, but who also has no chance of winning. There's no way they want an opponent who can realistically score an upset, no way. With the threat of Lewis hanging up the gloves, they'll want to protect their investment.

Though the opponent hasn't been officially announced, we can assume some things about him regardless of his name. First and foremost, we can bet our life that the fighter who faces Vitali on December 6 is a fighter who can't punch. This assures that if Vitali is upset it won't be via a knockout. We also can be assured that it will be a fighter who doesn't have a lot of money behind him and isn't well connected with the powers that be. This is an unwritten insurance policy that if things don't go well, Vitali losing a decision is just about out of the question, short of him being beaten half to death.

I haven't a doubt that the "opponent to be named later" will fit into at least one of the two mentioned scenarios, but most likely both. Again, I'm not picking on Klitschko, mostly all fighters today take this same path. I don't care what Klitschko's manager Klaus-Peter Kohl says about seeking a top ranked fighter. No doubt that when the fighter is named, the first thought that will come to your mind is, "Oh, Klitschko will definitely beat him." The only way this won't be the case is if it's for a title that was vacated.

From a boxing standpoint, what good does it do Klitschko to go in against a fighter who has no chance to beat him? I don't want to hear the crap that he needs to get the feel of being back in the ring; He's been a professional fighter going on eight years, and fought the best heavyweight in the world in his last fight. Now that he's gained acceptance as one of boxing's top heavyweights, why tarnish it with an easy win or struggling with an opponent who is perceived to be an easy win? Wouldn't a solid win over another top ranked heavyweight strengthen his hold on being the man to beat in the heavyweight division, outside of Lewis?

Do boxing fans have to be subjected to another setup? Didn't we see enough of that with Tyson? Most fighters' careers are built on setups on their way to becoming ranked or fighting for the title. There's nothing wrong with that early in a career, it's how fighters gain experience on the way up.

Vitali has fought three name heavyweights in his career, Byrd, Donald and Lewis. He was winning the Byrd fight when he called it off, though in my opinion, not by as much as the scorecards indicated. He is the only fighter to stop Larry Donald, and he gave Lewis quite a scare before the fight was stopped. The next time we see Vitali fight, it should be against one of the world's top heavyweights!

Come on Vitali. I dismissed you before the Lewis fight. You proved yourself to be worthy of high praise and should be included among the world's best big men. The next time we see you in the ring, let it be against a formidable fighter, who is a threat to beat you or, at the least, compete. If you score an impressive knockout against another fighter who is no more than a propped up opponent, what will it prove? I will start asking myself a question I thought you answered in your fight with Lewis. That is, "Are you a legitimate title threat when Lewis is gone, or did you catch him on an off night at the end of his title reign?"

You've yelled and screamed for Lewis since the doctor ended your fight with him. Don't contradict yourself and fight just an opponent in your next fight. Show the boxing public that you're for real and are willing to fight the very best. By fighting and beating the best you'll gain the respect and admiration of the fans.