

## Three Prediction: Klitschko-Johnson Mesis-Barrett & More

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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On Saturday night December 6th, two heavyweight fights will take place in the boxing Mecca of the world, New York's Madison Square Garden. In the main event Vitali Klitschko will fight Kirk Johnson. This is a fight that features two of the top ranked heavyweights in the world who don't hold a title. Prior to the Klitschko-Johnson title elimination, undefeated Joe Mesi will take on fringe contender Monte Barrett. The winner of the Mesi-Barrett fight takes a step closer to a possible title shot. Below are my thoughts on both fights and the future of heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis.

### Klitschko vs. Johnson

One was supposed to have been the last opponent of heavyweight champ Lennox Lewis, the other one was. It's been just about six months since Vitali Klitschko filled in for the injured Kirk Johnson and challenged Lennox Lewis for the title. In his fight versus Lewis, Klitschko acquitted himself quite well before the ring doctor halted the fight after the sixth round due to his severely cut eye.

When the fight was stopped, Klitschko led by a consensus of 4-2 in rounds against a very fat and under prepared Lewis. In his fight with Lewis, Klitschko erased all doubt about his heart that followed him after retiring on his stool and surrendering his WBO title to current IBF champ Chris Byrd. Vitali showed that he does have some boxing ability. No, he won't make anyone forget Holmes, but he's not the stiff that some had referred to him as being. He also took some monstrous hooks and uppercuts from Lewis without ever appearing to be on the verge of going down or out.

Kirk Johnson had to sit and watch Klitschko push an overconfident and out of shape Lewis to the brink of defeat. I haven't a doubt that Johnson feels that fate cheated him out of being in the ring with Lewis on a night he was very vulnerable. Instead it was Klitschko who enhanced his reputation and stature off of his showing in the biggest fight of his career to date. In fact, many have said since his fight with Lewis that Klitschko may be the heavyweight to be dealt with once Lewis is out of the picture.

Now Kirk Johnson is back healthy and I'll assume he's in good shape, despite weighing 260 pounds. On Saturday night December 6th he gets his chance to steal some of Klitschko's thunder and prove that he could've pushed Lewis every bit as far and hard as Klitschko did. We'll see?

I don't think this is a hard fight to handicap. I see Vitali holding just about all the trump cards in his hand. He's the bigger and stronger fighter. His conditioning has never been questioned, something that cannot be said about Johnson. Klitschko has also been in with better fighters than Johnson, and really hasn't been in a stinker. Johnson on the other hand fought former cruiserweight champ Al Cole to a life and death draw, and than won an uninspired decision in their rematch. In his title fight with former WBA champ John Ruiz, Johnson turned in another

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stinker and was trailing on all three scorecards when he was disqualified in the 10th round.

Opposed to Klitschko who was winning versus a slick boxer like Byrd before his shoulder gave out. He stopped survivor Larry Donald who goes the distance with everybody. And in his last fight he endured some of the best punches Lennox Lewis has ever thrown. Also, Klitschko will probably enter this fight with more confidence than he has had at any other time during his career. I think that he will be a better fighter due to his tough fight with Lewis. The way I see it, Klitschko will stop Johnson. Klitschko, in my opinion has too many weapons and ways to defeat Johnson. I can't see Johnson out-boxing him over the course of the fight and winning a decision. And I can't see him knocking Klitschko out. Having seen Vitali stand up under some of Lewis' bombs, I doubt Johnson can put him away?

### **Mesi vs. Barrett**

In the fight before the Klitschko-Johnson title elimination, heavyweights Joe Mesi and Monte Barrett will fight to possibly position the winner for a title shot some time in 2004. Mesi, fresh off of his one round knockout of DaVarryl Williamson last September makes his first appearance since signing a three fight deal with HBO. If nothing else, the fact that this is Joe's first fight under the HBO umbrella, I wouldn't look for an upset here. My feeling is that after Barrett, Mesi will fight one more fringe contender and than look to fight for one of the titles in his next fight.

Barrett is riding a six bout win streak since being stopped by Wladimir Klitschko on July 17, 2000. In those six fights since losing to Klitschko, Barrett has stopped the once beaten Erik Kirkland in his last fight on October 3rd of this year. Won a split decision over the twice beaten Robert Wiggins, and decisioned the also twice beaten Robert Davis. The biggest win and name on Barrett's ledger was over the 43 year old at the time former two time heavyweight champ Tim Witherspoon, who he won a split decision over on June 8th of 2001.

Lets not kid ourselves, Barrett is the perfect opponent for Mesi. He's not really fast, nor is he an outstanding boxer. Barrett also is not a big puncher, so it's not likely that he will test Mesi's chin. Obviously the deck is stacked against Barrett in this fight. He would damn near have to kill Mesi to get the decision, something I'm sure he and his management team must know. It would seem that the only way Barrett can beat Mesi is if he knocks him out. To achieve this he has to bring the fight to Mesi and engage with him. This favors Mesi since he is the better puncher and probably has the quicker hands.

I look for Mesi to come out and put the pressure on Barrett early in the fight. Barrett has not shown that he holds up well in the big spot when the heat is on. Mesi will most likely force Barrett to fight him instead of boxing him. This will lead to Barrett exchanging with Mesi which will ultimately lead to his down fall. I doubt that there will be any suspense in this bout. Mesi stops Barrett within four rounds.

### **The Future of Heavyweight Champ Lennox Lewis**

Look for Lewis-Klitschko II in 2004 provided Klitschko defeats Kirk Johnson. I've heard from some close to the Lewis camp that Lennox wants to go out on a better showing than what he

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did versus Vitali in his last fight. I know there have been some reports that Lewis is retired. My source comes from someone very close to Emanuel Steward. As of now according to Steward, Lennox will fight Vitali. Obviously things could change, they always do in boxing. My feeling is he'll fight one more time and it will most likely be against Vitali Klitschko.