In the end, as always, the fighter won the fight but in the case of Alexander Povetkin it was the trainer who showed him how.

Not just how to box, which is obviously essential for a prize fighter, but how to be a professional. That's what won Povetkin the portion of the WBA heavyweight title not owned by Wladimir Klitschko Saturday night in Erfurt, Germany. What won for him was that when he needed to most, he became a Professional.

The former Olympic gold medalist had ample reason not to act like one after he stepped into the ring with former world champion Ruslan Chagaev but Teddy Atlas wouldn't let him. Until Atlas showed up in Russia three weeks and two days before the fight, Povetkin's training camp was a shambles. It was also a joke but not a funny one.

He was supposed to have been in northern New Jersey training with Atlas for eight weeks but the people around him didn't get that done for whatever reason and Atlas had broadcast responsibilities with ESPN2's Friday Night Fights that made it impossible for him to come to Russia.

This was known by both sides for months but in the end somebody forgot. Or somebody chose to gamble with Povetkin's future. Whatever they did, they left the fighter and his trainer with 23 days to prepare for a southpaw former champion who, if nothing else, knows who he is.

Povetkin could have used the absence of a full camp, the resultant conditioning issues, Atlas' late arrival and more than a few other things to provide him with an excuse to lose. He made another choice, which is what life is. Its choices.

Several days before the fight Povetkin was quoted saying, "I could knock him out or he could knock me out.'' It was not what Atlas wanted to hear – even though anyone who has ever been involved in a heavyweight title fight understood the reality of that statement.

He let Povetkin know it by reminding him as they boarded a plane from Russia to Germany of what he had told him when they first met. Atlas asked Povetkin if he remembered what he'd said was the most important thing he needed to develop if he was going to become a world champion.

"Be a professional,'' Povetkin said.

"That's right,'' Atlas replied. "That's what you're going to be Saturday night.''

The night before the fight Atlas had trouble sleeping, worried about the things trainers worry about but worried about more than that. He too, had ample excuses to give in to defeat. In fact, he had ample excuses not to have even shown up in the first place, having been told one thing by the people around Povetkin while living a far different reality.

For a time it got to him but in the end he did not what a professional does but what a human being does. He was there for his fighter even when the wise choice – the Professional's choice – would have been to avoid the whole thing. Saturday night Povetkin was the beneficiary of that humanity in a sport where it is in short supply.

Doubt is a common resident of the prize ring. Doubt is there far more often than most fighters will ever admit. It is a natural part of the landscape, a year-round resident of gyms and arenas around the world.

There is an inherent danger in boxing not only of injury and unconsciousness but also of humiliation. To lose a sporting event is one thing. To lose a fight while standing half naked in front of thousands of people is something quite different.

For most fighters it is the potential for embarrassment they fear more than defeat or injury. After all that had gone on in Povetkin's fractious training camp the door was open for him to give in however and just let that happen.

The morning of the fight Atlas sensed this so when he came down to meet Povetkin in the hotel he said, "You're ready to be a professional today. Now let's go become a champion.''

Alexander Povetkin, who soon would be alone on a stage far bigger than he thought it would be when he was a boy in a small Russian village dreaming of being heavyweight champion, nodded in agreement. He believed he would be a professional because his trainer, who had taught him what that meant, told him he was one.

And unlike a lot of other people in his world, his trainer didn't lie.

As Atlas sat up all night he came to a decision. He had a well thought out game plan of how to beat Chagaev, who was himself a Professional Atlas respected. But he decided sometime in the middle of the night he would make a slight shift.

"They don't think Sasha is a boxer,'' Atlas said to himself. "So tomorrow we box this guy.''

It was not a total departure from the plan, just a minor alteration. So he told Povetkin instead of starting slowly, as he so often had in the past, he would put something on Chagaev early so that he would be wary of seeing that again later. Then he would box from the outside, slipping punches, pot-shoting Chagaev, "keeping behind him.''

“I never told one of my fighters to do that before,’’ Atlas recalled later, after Povetkin’s hand had been raised following a unanimous decision that was not particularly close. “I wanted Chagaev to have to chase Sasha.’’

He did with little success. Yet around the sixth round Povetkin, perhaps the doubts about his conditioning whispering in his ear, began to flag a bit. He seemed to slow down and Chagaev sensed it. It was then that the two years spent with Atlas in gyms around New Jersey, often just the two of them working alone on small details, showed.

Even Povetkin’s German promoters, who have been highly critical of Atlas much of the time because he wouldn’t continence what he believed were unwise choices, conceded that during that sixth round they saw something from Povetkin they had never seen before.

He was slipping punches, making Chagaev miss, turning defense into offense and then getting back to a safe distance. He was a boxer but he had become more than that. He was a Professional now, a fighter refusing to give in to doubt or to take the open road of easy escape in excuses for defeat.

In any walk of life there is no higher praise for a man than to hear, “He’s a professional.’’ Saturday night Povetkin was just that. He was what Atlas has long been. Because of it what Atlas promised him that first day was delivered. The Professional became The Champion.

Standing behind him, a smile on his face for the first time in months, stood another professional, a trainer of prize fighters who trains not just the body but the mind.

Whether he’ll ever stand there again who knows? Atlas has been forced to deal with many unnecessarily difficult circumstances in the two years he has worked with Povetkin. They were not of the fighter’s making but they were the kind of difficulties and deceits that caused Atlas to walk away from training and into a broadcast booth, where he is one of boxing’s best and most controversial analysts because he does there what he did with Povetkin, years ago.

Atlas tells you the truth, even when you don’t want to hear it. Because he did he made Povetkin

a Professional and The Professional made Atlas the trainer of his second heavyweight champion. Fair trade.

In the end, Alexander Povetkin had to block out the doubts, listen to Atlas' instructions and execute the plan. No trainer wins without that. But the fighter didn't win alone either.

Not by a long shot.