

Ward Trainer Virgil Hunter Talks Kessler, Bute and Going to 175..MARKARIAN

Written by Raymond Markarian
Saturday, 28 January 2012 00:07



Only the endless bickering of Republican Presidential candidates can rival the arguments spewed between some of boxing's best. Because whether they are trying to gain a title or defend one, fighters always need an opponent. And after beating Carl Froch last month to win the Super Six Tournament, super middleweight champion Andre Ward has yet to find his next foe. Worthy contenders Mikkel Kessler and Lucian Bute await a shot at the undefeated Ward.

In the spirit of debate, TSS enters the mind of perpetual boxing wisdom of Ward's trainer Virgil Hunter. With Hunter, Ward has risen up the pound for pound boxing rankings. Hunter gives thoughts on potential fights with Bute and Kessler, and from the generally recognized 2011 trainer of the year we received an education on boxing business.

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In our discussion, Hunter tells us copious reasons why Andre Ward will choose his next opponent. Check out what else he has to say.

RM: What do you gather from everything you hear about fights with either Mikkel Kessler or Lucian Bute? What is your opinion?

VH: We made it clear about Bute. We just got out of a long tournament. We are just asking him to fight somebody along the same caliber that we fought. You got a lot of Super Six fighters out there that he could fight. He could fight Dirrell. Kessler looks like he is ready. We are not asking him to fight each one of them. But at least fight one of them. You know, and it is better for both of us.

RM: So if Bute beats Carl Froch, or knocks him out, then we are going to see Ward vs. Bute?

VH: If he fights Froch and stops him, the call for Ward and Bute goes higher and louder. Bute will sway the masses that say, 'Hey Ward decisioned Froch, but Bute stopped Froch.' If Bute stops Froch it will automatically grow a Ward vs. Bute fight proportionally. And we could both capitalize on a fight of that magnitude. I think Bute fighting Froch or anyone in the Super Six would help both parties.

RM: But do you feel like you are in the place to make this type of decision for Lucian Bute?

VH: Well, first of all we are humble people. Whatever position we are in right now we earned it. We did not talk our way into that position. We fought our way to that position. And I think what we have requested is not unreasonable at all. I think it is very reasonable considering where Lucian Bute's and Andre's careers have gone in the last three years. Bute and his team are genuine people. I don't think they have any problems with it.

RM: Now talking about Kessler. It seems like Kessler has a sense of entitlement through all of this. I mean, he lost to Ward, beat Carl Froch, and then basically disappeared. Now he is back in the talks to fight Andre again. How do you feel about that?

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VH: Well first of all, there has been no indication that Mikkel Kessler wants to fight Andre. Before we fought Froch, they (Kessler's team) put out a ten million dollar offer for the winner of the Super Six to fight Mikkel Kessler.

RM: When did you hear that?

VH: I heard this maybe three weeks before the Super Six final. Sauerland (Kessler's promoter) put out a huge statement. It is in writing. They were supposedly willing to pay each fighter ten million dollars to fight them in Denmark, regardless of who won. On the week of the (Ward vs. Froch) fight, they made it clear that they were pulling for Carl Froch to win. I believe that if Carl Froch won, that offer would still be on the table. That offer would still be talked about right now. But for some reason, we don't hear anything about it after we won the fight. From that sense I am very disappointed in Sauerland promotions and I am very disappointed in Mikkel Kessler.

RM: So at the end of the day Kessler does not want to fight Andre Ward?

VH: Well, I am not going to question a man's heart. Mikkel is a courageous guy. He doesn't have to prove that he is courageous. But outside of being courageous he is contradicting himself. I heard an interview by Steve Bunce from BBC boxing. Mikkel was giving all kinds of excuses about his loss to Andre and all were untrue. He literally said I made him take his hand wraps off which is not true. They never even started wrapping his hands. Then he said we subjected him to the cold weather at the press conference. I don't understand that one. When he left his hotel he should have had a good indication of how cold it was outside. Somebody should have told him to go back in and get a warm jacket and warm gloves. He also indicated that they forced him to leave his dressing room forty-five minutes before the bout. That is definitely untrue because it was a television fight. And he said everything we did to him caused him to lose the fight. Then he warned Carl Froch about it. Thank goodness Carl Froch is a good sport, a strong man, and a dignified man. After the fight was over, Froch said 'Andre Ward beat me fair and square. I have nothing more to say. He beat me. No excuses.' That is a good blueprint for Mikkel Kessler. I think Froch, after crying about his loss in Denmark, grew up. He changed for the better of his sport and his division. We just hope Mikkel Kessler would do the same. But we would love to give him an opportunity to redeem himself particularly if there is ten million dollars on the table. I want to know why all of a sudden we are not talking about it.

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RM: So you would go to Denmark to fight Mikkell Kessler for ten million dollars?

VH: Let me just say this. I am not saying we'll go. I am not saying we won't go. But I am sure we will find a way to fight for ten million dollars. You see?

RM: OK, I see. Well, Kessler lost two fights in his career. Do see it as a sign of disrespect that Kessler only complains about his loss to Ward, not his loss to Joe Calzaghe?

VH: Well, that goes back to the entitlement statement that you made.

RM: Right.

VH: He just never thought that Andre Ward could beat him. He hasn't accepted that loss yet. It had a psychological effect on him. Look, that loss had a tremendous effect on him. It was much worse than the Calzaghe fight. Mikkell was in that fight. Calzaghe pulled it out in the last few rounds. He was never close against Andre Ward. So it is a harder loss to deal with. And if all of the excuses he was giving were true then why would he fire his coach? The same guy he has been working with for twenty years. How does the coach fit in the equation, you see what I'm saying?

RM: Yeah.

VH: If he said the hand wraps, weather, and the time was the reason then why did poor Richard Olsen who has been with you for twenty years, been with you from day one, and started you off as a kid when you were fighting for trophies, why was he the scapegoat? He is the one that ended up getting fired. That is what I don't understand. So it has got to be deeper than the excuses that he is giving. What he needs to do is come to grips with the loss and redeem himself.

RM: Well, if all he does is make excuses, then why even go after Kessler again? There have

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been plenty of guys making excuses to fight you again, right?

VH: No. Nobody has ever asked for a rematch.

RM: Kessler is the only one?

VH: He hasn't asked for a rematch either.

RM: OK.

VH: There is not one person that has asked for a rematch with Andre Ward. That is what people need to realize. And you know what, I don't want to come out and put words in Mikkel's mouth. I haven't heard him say he would or wouldn't fight Andre again. But his promotional company is saying it. All I heard from Mikkel is excuses.

RM: OK.

VH: Mikkel is champion emeritus. Showtime gave him that position. Showtime said he will have a shot at the winner of the tournament. And I think he should take advantage of that. It is not just for pride or redemption. He is just a great fighter. And great fighters fight. And it is good for the sport and it is good for the division. It is good for Andre Ward and it is good for Mikkel Kessler. However it turns out, I still have respect for him and his company. He is a great champion and doesn't have to prove anything along those lines. All I am saying is that a second fight would be a great fight.

RM: So with Bute, you are happy with the fact that he is willing to prove himself against Carl Froch or another member of the Super Six. You guys don't really want to fight him at the moment, is that correct?

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VH: No, I don't want to say we don't want to fight him at the moment. We want to fight him at the right moment. There is a difference between the two. We feel entitled to fight at the right moment. And we also feel that it is good for him to fight at the right moment. I mean, come on, and think about it, if he beats Carl Froch in a dominating manner our fight will get really hot. We have validated ourselves to a certain level. All we ask is for him to validate himself to a certain level by taking on the competition.

RM: So, all of these guys are fighting each other. What's the next move for you?

VH: Well, we haven't sat down. We want to take one thing at a time. We want to get the injured hand back in fighting action. There is no sense in talking about the next move until we got things up and running. It is really a time of relaxation and recuperation for Andre Ward. People don't realize the preparation for all of these fights has been going on for two and a half years. Regardless of what anybody says when you fight Edison Miranda, Mikkel Kessler, Allan Green, Sakio Bika, Arthur Abraham, and Carl Froch that is a gauntlet. A lot of people like to put emphasis in who Froch has fought. Well guess what, we are right there along with him. There is no difference. I don't see anybody calling out Sakio Bika. And Allan Green is a threat to anybody he gets in the ring with.

RM: OK, so basically you have gone through the pit and fought the best. It is time for these other guys to go through the pit right?

VH: Well, I think it is sound business. I think we have to treat boxing like a business because it is a business. There is no need to rush. We have to make sound decisions. Right now I can't tell you when we are going to fight and who we are going to fight. But we are anxious to fight again.

RM: Andre was talking about moving up to light heavyweight. How do you feel about that?

VH: For the right fight, I think moving up in weight is a great option. If it is a fight the fans want to see, particularly a reputable opponent, that move could be made in the near future.

RM: The Kessler fight makes sense for the right money. But besides Bute, there is no one left

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for you to fight at 168 in my opinion. So the natural move would be to move up to 175, right?

VH: There are plenty of challenges for Andre at 168. You know Ray, rematches are always in order. Why fight Kessler? Because he is saying it's a fluke. And a lot of his fans are saying it's a fluke. That is why you fight him again. So if he thinks it was a fluke, we will give him an opportunity to prove it was a fluke. His doubt only gives that rematch merit. The fact that he is saying 'you are not better than me, and the reason why you beat me is because of this' makes us want to prove him wrong. We think it's a great fight.

RM: OK.

VH: Sauerland and all those guys need to back up that proposition. Put that ten million back on the table. If not, I'd like to know why you retracted it. Ten million dollars is a good reason to fight, I don't care who it is.

RM: Alright. Any last words you'd like to share Mr. Hunter?

VH: Well, I'd like to thank all the fans that have supported us. I hope that Andre has proven a lot to people, fighting a fight with a broken hand against a formidable opponent Carl Froch, and coming out of that in a dominant manner. And first and foremost, the boxing world has to realize that they have a great man in Andre Ward. He is a man of principle and a man of integrity. He is not somebody that you should ignore. I know a lot of people don't understand his style of fighting. But true fight fans understand greatness. And there is greatness in Andre Ward.

RM: Hey, I forgot to ask, how you feel about being recognized as the trainer of the year in 2011?

VH: I am humbled. That is a great feeling. There are a lot of great coaches out there. A lot of people are deserving of being trainer of the year. I leave it up to the boxing writers. I think I did get ESPN trainer of the year. And I am very grateful for that. I am in the coaching fraternity. I know what they go through. I am happy for anybody who gets that award.

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dino da vinci says:

Really, how can you not love Team Ward?

Bute can fight. A lot. But there is a reason some amateur fighters prefer to turn pro rather than stay in the amateurs, and that is because in the amateur tournaments you have to fight whoever is coming out of the other bracket. We were just fortunate enough to watch this on a pro level. Let's see Bute fight Froch, with the winner getting another crack at Ward.

ali says:

Virgil makes a great point about fighting Bute let's see if he can beat someone like Froch first before he gets in the ring with Ward. Like he said if he looks better then Ward did beating Froch then that would make the fight a lot bigger. I do wonder if Bute is willing to leave Canada to fight Ward that might be the reason that fight doesn't get mad.

Radam G says:

They can tangle in a neutral place like Abu Dhabi. Holla!

amayseng says:

bute would beat froch to death..

dont be fooled by butes lack of competition, its not his fault.

bute is like a bigger sergio martinez with more power and who goes to the body better than anyone in the business today.

ward vs bute is a toss up. bute has more speed and power and uses angles ward has never seen before but ward is fantastic at adjusting and has all the tools except one punch knockout power.

that fight would be close either way...

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just hope froch actually fights bute, but i think his management knows he will get starched
and are afraid to have back to back losses