

Danny Williams Hits Vegas and Klitschko

Written by Robert Ecksel

Tuesday, 07 December 2004 18:00

When most of us on this side of the pond think of British heavyweights we think of Lennox Lewis. But there's Frank Bruno, who fought Tyson in 1989 and 1996. There's Henry Cooper, who fought Ali in 1963 and 1966. There's Don Cockell, who fought Marciano in 1955. There's Tommy Farr, who fought Joe Louis in 1937.

No one used to think of Danny Williams.

"Dynamite" Danny Williams was born in Brixton, London, England on July 13, 1973. Brixton is to London as Brownsville is to New York, as the Fifth Ward is to Houston, so this Saturday Williams is fighting the heavyweight champ Vitali Klitschko at the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas for the WBC crown. It took Klitschko many years to make it to the top. It took Dynamite Danny forever to get this far.

"When I was a little baby, my dad said he had a dream that I was going to be heavyweight champion of the world," Williams told me. "So he forced me into boxing. I didn't want to do it, but he made me do it. He was working on the mitts and teaching me how to box and then I finally started to like the sport after a few years. I started in it officially when I was eight years old."

Williams went 29-6 as an amateur and turned pro in 1994 at the age of twenty-two with a second round TKO. He won his next fifteen fights, twelve of them by knockout. Williams won his first regional title at Bethnal Green in 1998. He followed it up by capturing the British Commonwealth crown with a first round kayo the following year. Williams won and lost that title six times from 1999 to 2003, displaying a big heart, big punch, big chin and big cojones.

After nearly ten years as a pro, with a record of 31-3 (27 KOs), Danny Williams, in the biggest fight of his life, was handpicked by Mike Tyson, who was coming off a year and a half layoff, to be the former champ's next victim. They met in Louisville, Kentucky on July 30, 2004 and it looked like Danny didn't have a chance. Although Tyson was past his prime, he was still dangerous, whereas no one knew much about Danny Williams.

"I told everyone going in that I was confident that I could win," Williams said. "I was in great shape for that fight and had never trained harder. I was chosen as Mike Tyson's opponent because I had a good record, was big and looked the part. They obviously thought I was going to be knocked out within a few rounds. But for one of the few times in my career, I was actually very relaxed. In the past I was always the favorite and so much was always expected of me. I was always supposed to win. But for the fight with Tyson, nobody gave me a chance and there was no pressure on me at all. I knew the key was to survive his early attack and then take him into the later rounds. I thought I would get him in the fifth round. But we did not make it that far."

Williams got rocked in the first stanza, but fired back and made it through the round.

"He hurt me for a few seconds in the first round but I came back and boxed him smart," said

Danny Williams Hits Vegas and Klitschko

Written by Robert Ecksel

Tuesday, 07 December 2004 18:00

Williams. "I showed I am a warrior. Once I hurt him, I let go and kept punching and punching. I always thought I could win. Every single round that went by, his punching power seemed to grow less. So I knew I was going to take him out."

Tyson blew out his knee throwing a punch and Williams dominated round two. In the third he knocked Tyson to the ropes and dropped him to the canvas with a barrage of twenty-six unanswered punches. And nothing has been the same since.

"My life is definitely a lot more hectic," Williams said. "A five minute walk now takes half an hour because people are shouting out to me in the street or coming up to me and giving me a hug."

Not only are people shouting and giving him hugs. They are also giving him opportunities.

"Lennox has gone and it looked like there was going to be no one to take over from him. Hopefully I can be that man to take over. The heavyweight division is very poor right now and no one stands out. It is wide open," said Williams. "That is where I come in and it is there for the taking - big time. After nearly ten years as a professional, I have my chance at a world title. I appreciate the fact that Klitschko is giving me this opportunity. But I am totally focused on bringing the crown back to Britain."

Danny Williams can't stand and trade with the Ukrainian. He'll have to bob and weave, use his speed, play all the angles. Klitschko can punch and is always in shape. Williams will have to use his head. I asked Danny's trainer, Jim McDonnell, his thoughts on the champion.

"The thing with Vitali is what you see is what you get," the trainer said. "So it's a different game plan from the Tyson fight. With Tyson you find one of the greatest heavyweights of all time. You find someone who gives you awesome angles, who gives you fantastic power. With Klitschko he'll bring the power, he'll bring the true European standard to the ring, a lot of determination. And that's it. Danny's in much better shape than for the Tyson fight. He took the Tyson fight with only five weeks notice. He was looking for an opponent and they made a mistake."

That mistake landed Tyson on the seat of his pants, whereas Klitschko still looks like the tower of power.

Jim McDonnell had a twinkle in his eye: "It can take two years, as they say in London, to build two towers, and they can be blown away in thirty seconds. That's what could happen in this fight."

The trainer got that right. When heavyweights collide anything can happen. Someday someone will derail the Klitschko Express. It might happen a year from now. It might happen Saturday.

Before leaving Danny Williams to his final preparations for the title fight with Vitali, I asked how he hopes to beat the big man when they meet.

"What I need to do to beat Klitschko," he said, "is hit him more than he hits me."