

Like Douglas, Danny Williams Keeps Getting Better

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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As the countdown to the Vitali Klitschko-Danny Williams WBC heavyweight title fight winds down, it seems that Danny Williams becomes a better fighter with each passing day. Slightly over four months have passed since Williams stopped former heavyweight champ Mike Tyson at 2:51 of the fourth round in his last fight. The shocking knockout of Tyson earned Williams a title fight against Vitali Klitschko. Klitschko is considered by many boxing observers to be the most formidable heavyweight in world.

During the past week many stories have surfaced stating just how good a fighter Danny Williams really is, and if he beat Klitschko it wouldn't be a shock to some. It amazes me how much greater fighters all of the sudden become after stopping Mike Tyson. These are the same type of stories that emerged about Buster Douglas after he shocked the boxing world when he knocked out Tyson in February of 1990.

After Douglas stopped Tyson, stories were written about his size and reach and how they complimented his outstanding boxing skills. However, not a single word of those skills was mentioned before the fight. Now, looking back, everybody knew Tyson was out of shape. Which makes me wonder even more why none of those glowing reports about Douglas found their way into the media before his fight with Tyson? I think the reason is quite obvious: they didn't exist. In reality, Buster Douglas was a nice fighter, but wasn't viewed as a fighter who would one day become the undisputed heavyweight champion. Prior to the Tyson fight he didn't beat one upper-tier heavyweight and was stopped in his only title shot by Tony Tucker.

However his perception as a fighter changed dramatically based on only one fight, his knockout of Mike Tyson. By the time October rolled around and he was about to defend his undisputed title against Evander Holyfield, he was the favorite. Imagine Douglas being favored over Holyfield. I would be willing to bet that if Douglas fought Holyfield the night he fought Tyson, he would have been almost as big of an underdog as he was against Tyson. The fact that he beat Tyson led many to wrongly assume that Douglas was a better fighter and could beat Holyfield. When Douglas and Holyfield finally fought, Holyfield knocked Douglas out in the third round with one counter right hand to become the new undisputed heavyweight champion.

Today, in my opinion, too many analysts and fans place way too much stock in one fight or one game. This is not meant to take anything away from Danny Williams, but I think the burden of proof is still on him versus the world's top heavyweights. I need to see more than him beating a rusty 38 year old Mike Tyson - who had only fought 50 seconds in a year and a half - before I'm convinced that he is the next heavyweight champion.

Now we are hearing that Williams' has discovered self belief, and that he's always been a world-class heavyweight fighter. Again, based on one fight. Is the real Danny Williams the fighter who was dropped three times and stopped by Sinan Samil Sam, and lost his British Empire title to Michael Sprott 11 months ago? Or he is the fighter we saw once time in 35 fights, the one who beat Tyson?

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I guess the Danny Williams who had to fight Michael Sprott twice just to beat him once and was dropped three times and stopped by Sinan Samil Sam isn't the real Danny Williams. The real Danny Williams is the fighter we saw one time in 35 fights, the one who beat Tyson.

Over the years I have learned two things. One, never use one great fight or game as a barometer to judge any fighter or team, ignoring their body of work up to that point. What they've done excluding that one great fight or game is a more realistic indication of who they are. And two, judging a fighter strictly off of beating Mike Tyson is the biggest mistake in the world.

Buster Douglas never beat one upper-tier heavyweight before or after fighting Mike Tyson. He just happened to have a career night against an overrated Tyson in his prime. Heading into his first fight with Tyson, Evander Holyfield was coming off the two worst fights of his career at the time (his third fight with Riddick Bowe and his last fight against Bobby Czyz) and hadn't scored a knockout since his fight against Bert Cooper in November of 1991. Yet he had Tyson down and won nine out of ten rounds before stopping him in the eleventh in November of 1996.

Seven months later Holyfield beat Tyson again when Mike was disqualified for biting Evander's ears in their rematch. After winning the rematch with Tyson, many were saying Holyfield resurrected his career. However after beating Michael Moorer in their rematch five months after beating Tyson in their second fight, Holyfield never again looked like the great fighter he once was.

In June of 2002 Lennox Lewis finally escaped the shadow of Mike Tyson when he knocked him out in the eighth round of their highly anticipated fight. One year later Lewis defended his title against top ranked Vitali Klitschko. Against Klitschko, Lewis was rocked and almost knocked down. Lewis won the fight when Klitschko couldn't continue after the sixth round due to a severely cut eye. Lewis retired in February of 2004, eight months after fighting Klitschko.

Now we are counting down to Danny Williams' FFABT, (first fight after beating Tyson). And just as Douglas became a better fighter than he really was, Danny Williams is becoming better than his pre-Tyson career indicates. So much in fact that Tyson's trainer Freddie Roach said Williams has the tools to cut down the giant Klitschko. Roach also said, "What he gained from beating Mike is a lot of confidence, which is what everybody says he lacked before he fought Mike."

Although I respect the wisdom of Freddie Roach, I think he left out something important. Tyson has never won a fight in which he was down or trailed. What separates Mike Tyson from the greatest of the greats is the fact that he has never shown the capacity to overcome resistance. He has never won a fight once he started losing it.

I think getting Klitschko's heart will be a little tougher than getting Tyson's. Klitschko is always in top shape and does have some ability. I don't think he is the next Lewis or Holmes, but I think he is probably the best heavyweight in the world at this time. Danny Williams may actually turn out to be the best heavyweight in the world in the future, but I need to see more of him before I believe it. And I definitely need more than just him beating Mike Tyson in his last fight to

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evaluate and deem him the fighter to beat in the heavyweight division.