

## A Boxing Holiday Season Wish List

Written by Scott Yaniga

Wednesday, 15 December 2004 18:00

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It's that time of the year again, folks. You know, where it seems every wall, window and otherwise blank surface is festooned with gay decoration, where festive music is blaring from the speakers and everyone you see is floating around with an ecstatic, beatific look on his or her face, beaming in expectation of some imminent delight.

No, I'm not talking about the World Boxing Council's offices prior to their collecting a world title-sanctioning fee. I'm talking your yearly Christmas, Kwanzaa, and/or Chanukah holiday, Skee-zix.

So, let's not stand on ceremony. Let's get right to my holiday wish list . . . and this year it's a real short one:

I want a dominant heavyweight champion.

That's it. No Sirius satellite radio. No newfangled mp3 player (I still own 8-tracks, for heaven's sake). No prime rib/cheese/beer/fruit of the month subscription either. Nope. All I want is for a guy to come along and make me forget—if only for a couple of years—that we as a boxing community are counting on a huge, awkward 33 year old who still hasn't learned to keep his guard up or how to move laterally away from a punch to be the savior of our sport's money division.

WBC heavyweight champion Vitali Klitschko is a nice, intelligent man. He showed his mettle and physical toughness in that back alley brawl with Lennox Lewis. He has knocked down everyone they've set up (no pun intended) in front of him of late, but he's no standard-bearer for the dreadnaught boys. He seems to be missing that intangible quality that separates a good, earnest fighter from a great fighter.

He may be pushing 6'7" but he fights at times as if he's the little guy in the ring. It is quite a paradox to watch this Colossus stalk towards an opponent and then see him wave those mighty limbs of his in some unsure, discomfited way until he manages to land a good shot. Then he'll tear into his foe with those strong, deliberate punches of his - until a counter shot comes his way. At that point his face seems to be gripped in a rictus of fear; eyes widening, mouth agape as he quickly pulls straight back, keeping his arms extended in a clumsy attempt to block punches.

Not at all like a cocksure Muhammad Ali gliding away from danger, or a sneering Larry Holmes doing a paint job with that wicked jab, or a young, snorting Tyson advancing with blood in his eyes and malice in his heart.

No, watching Vitali Klitschko exhibit his ring skills is akin to suffering through Richard Milhous Nixon attempting to do The Twist at a White House soiree. You give the guy credit, but it ain't real pretty to watch.

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And it's not all Dr. Klitschko's fault, either, as the current roster of alphabet champs and top-ten remnants aren't exactly an awe-inspiring bunch. James Toney, Chris Byrd, Hasim Rahman, John Ruiz, Lamon Brewster, Jameel McCline and...Andrew Golota? You'd have to go back to the late 1970s and early '80s to find a motlier bunch of pretenders to the throne. Back then at least we had a Larry Holmes ruling the roost. And until his marvelous skills started to slowly erode, we did have a fighter who dominated his challengers and who was interesting to watch. Then disinterest and decrepitude started to show on Larry and we were forced to watch as the likes of Renaldo "Mister" Snipes, Tex Cobb, Lucien Rodriguez and Bonecrusher Smith either gave Larry fits or force him to go the distance in unnecessarily grueling fights.

As for the IBF's entry in the heavyweight derby, Chris Byrd is still the best and purest boxer in the division. Unfortunately, watching him work is only slightly less entertaining than clipping one's toenails. The only element of suspense to his fights is his sudden susceptibility to the big punch. His frighteningly close shave at the hands of limited Jameel McCline recently is a not-so-subtle reminder that this beefed-up middleweight is now 34 years of age and starting to pick up speed as he descends that slippery slope of decline.

WBA titleholder John Ruiz is still the best example of what limited skill, combined with a stubborn determination to survive, can accomplish. This guy has elevated "The Clutch" to an art form. His fighting style is uglier than a chicken with lips, but it works for him, much to the detriment of the sport.

So, come on Santa, bring me a big, bouncing heavyweight who chews glass and craps thunderbolts; someone who will strike fear into the rest of the division and will do 1 to 2 million PPV buys every time he has a big fight; a heavyweight champ who will force some of the existing crop of big guys to enter a well-deserved and long overdue retirement, and make some of the younger ones reconsider their current line of employment.