

## Wanted: Heavyweights

Written by Steve Kim  
Monday, 29 November 1999 19:00

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This past Saturday Michael Grant would make it five straight wins since his devastating back-to-back knockout losses to Lennox Lewis and Jameel McCline. Grant, who was once touted as the future of the heavyweight division would stop journeyman Robert Davis in three rounds.

Davis, isn't a great fighter or even a fringe contender, but he does represent a step-up for Grant, post-McCline. After his 41-second loss to McCline last July- in which he would eat an early left hook and fracture his ankle while falling to the canvas-his trainer Teddy Atlas would prescribe a steady diet of low level opposition. Davis, is at least a 'Heavyweight Explosion'-type big man.

With his emphatic victory, some are now focusing their attention back on Grant. No, Grant isn't a fight or two from another title shot, but he is now just a couple of wins from being a player again in the heavyweight division. And why not?

There is a familiarity with Grant, he's a marketable guy, he's well-spoken and having Atlas in your corner is always worth a few headlines.

All the way across the other side of the country was Lance Whitaker, who went 'Goofi' last year when he would dump his trainer Joe Goossen and his promoter America Presents after his breakthrough victory against Oleg Maskaev last February. Whitaker, was on the verge of being a legitimate contender in the heavyweight division and he would proceed to clean house. The result was one terrible nickname, two trainers and a record of 1-1-1. After short stints with Phil Borgia and then Thell Torrance, struggles against McCline and Ray Austin( in which he was on the fortunate end of a controversial draw), he decided to give his old trainer a call about a month ago.

They are now reunited and Whitaker, who is back to being 'Mt Whitaker', has been working with Goossen at his Van Nuys gym the past several weeks. Both Goossen and Whitaker say that what's in the past, will be left in the past and that they are looking towards a bright future.

And it isn't completely out of the realm to think that both Grant and Whitaker won't rise back to some prominence in this division. Afterall, outside of Lennox Lewis, this division is filled with question marks. You say Wladimir Klitschko? Hate to burst your bubble but anyone with a loss to Ross Purrrity has questions that have to be answered. No, neither Grant or Whitaker seem to have the pure skills to go all the way to the top of the game, but you know what? These days it's probably not needed- just watch Johnny Ruiz-Kirk Johnson, and you tell me if Grant or Whitaker on a good night couldn't beat either guy.

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In any other division these two guys would have been thrown into the scrap heap and forgotten about. In the heavyweight class, these two will always have a place in the era of the super-heavyweight. Both Grant and Whitaker are in the 6-7', 250-pound range, these aren't your fathers heavyweights. But remember, bigger doesn't necessarily mean better.

Grant and Whitaker are behemoths with picturesque builds and good athletes who are still learning the intricacies of this sport. But what they represent is an era when more and more American bred big men are really just failed power forwards, outside linebackers and designated hitters. In other words, they failed at other sports in getting to the professional level so boxing in a sense became their refuge.

Think about it, while boxing is the toughest sport there is, the irony is that no other sport is the easiest to participate in at the professional level. In other sports like basketball, football and baseball you have to prove you have the skills to play at the highest echelon. In boxing, unfortunately, you just have to prove you have a heartbeat and pass your medicals.

Of course that doesn't mean that anyone can succeed at what is the toughest game. So in that sense, Grant and Whitaker, with what little boxing experience they had, have done relatively well. Grant, would make a host of HBO appearances leading up to his butchering at the hands of Lewis- for which he was paid over \$4 million. And Whitaker, has made more than a few appearances on HBO and Showtime. Financially, they've done better than 95-percent of those who enter this sport.

As decent heavyweights they got early opportunities to shine. As comebacking heavyweights, they'll get more opportunities to shine again.  
SO WHY IS THIS HAPPENING? Why is there a dearth of quality American heavyweights? I think it's pretty simple, with the rise in prominence of basketball, football and baseball, boxing is simply not getting the best athletes anymore. Also with segregation a thing of the past, young African-Americans, which once flocked to boxing, are now more inclined to participating in sports that have college scholarships and professional opportunities that almost guarantee financial security. Boxing as of right now doesn't provide any of those things.

It shouldn't come as a shock to anybody that Europeans and Latins are beginning to gain more and more prominence in this sport as the years go on. Europeans, have made incredible strides in the game of basketball- if you don't believe, just review the most recent NBA draft- and the Klitschko brothers could be signalling a new breed of fighters from a foreign land that succeed in the U.S.

Latins, generally don't have the size to be heavyweights, or football or

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basketball players for that matter, but their culture still embraces boxing as a first-tier sport and you get the feeling that participation in boxing from them will always be high.

At one time in this country, there were plenty of Caucasian fighters who were Jewish, Irish and Italian. As more of them moved up from the working class and saw other opportunities in front of them, they have mostly vanished from the world-class landscape. African-Americans you get the feeling, will always produce quality fighters, but as other sports begin( or already have) captured the interest and participation of this group- they could be the next group to decline in numbers, especially at the higher weight classes.

About 30 to 40 years ago, a Kobe Bryant, a Barry Bonds or a Marshall Faulk could have been contending for a heavyweight championship. Now, we have John Ruiz and Kirk Johnson battling it out for a heavyweight title.

### NO WAY JOSE, AGAIN

So WBC dictator Jose Sulaiman in suing Mike Tyson, Lennox Lewis and seemingly everyone else in boxing for \$56 million for injuries he suffered in their January fracas in New York.

Funny, but in his lawsuit he mentioned a litany of ailments he suffered when he was trampled on, but he didn't list brain damage. Because it's obvious to me he must have gotten some in that melee to file this frivolous lawsuit.

### NOVEMBER TO REMEMBER

It looks like on November 2nd, Marco Antonio Barrera will take on either Johnny Tapia or Willie Jorin on HBO. And then on the 16h, Erik Morales will face Paulie Ayala.

### MAYWEATHER-CASTILLO II

The official announcement was made for the rematch between Floyd Mayweather and Jose Luis Castillo on October 5th at the Mandalay Bay for 'the Pretty Boy's WBC belt that he won in controversial fashion in April.

For the record, I think Castillo will make this another tough night for Mayweather and do enough the second time around to get the decision.