

The War at 154

Written by Rick Folstad
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They're calling it the "War at 154," though no one will confuse it with plucking evil dictators out of dirty rat holes or patrolling the rubble and dark streets of a dying city.

Still, they're hoping this fight somehow lives up to its top billing, praying a slugfest breaks out instead of 12 rounds of elevator music.

IBF champ Winky Wright (46-3, 25 KOs), versus WBA and WBC champ Shane Mosley (39-2, 35 KOs) for the undisputed junior-middleweight (or, depending on your mood, super-welterweight) championship of the world.

Finally.

It has a nice, long-overdue ring to it, a kind of "it's about damn time," feel to it.

If you want to give credit to the right people for getting this fight done, you can start with Cory Spinks, an unlikely hero now known as the undisputed welterweight champ of the world.

If Spinks hadn't beaten Ricardo Mayorga on Dec. 13, Wright could have spent January and February snagging some sun on a St. Petersburg beach. That's because Mayorga was expected to walk through Spinks on his way to a lucrative fight with Mosley in March.

But somehow, Spinks found a way to beat Mayorga and suddenly, Mosley no longer had a March opponent and everything appeared to be ruined. Plans were shattered, promises broken, money was lost. The wife cried, the dog howled and the kids were sent to bed early.

How can this happen?

Then an idea occurred to someone important.

Hey, what about Ronald "Winky" Wright? I don't think he's got any big plans for March.

Winky, who was free in March, owes Cory a friendly slap on the back.

So what does the March 13 fight between Mosley and Wright (on HBO) at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas mean?

Just about everything if you weigh 154 and hold a world title belt.

It means Winky finally gets the big-money, big-name fight that could define his career, the fight he's been chasing since his controversial majority-decision loss to Fernando Vargas in 1999.

It means Gary Shaw, Mosley's promoter, also deserves a little pat on the back for somehow

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putting this fight together.

It means for the first time in 29 years, you'll only have to know one name when the bar talk turns to who the best junior-middleweight fighter in the world is.

It means Mosley better arrive at the gym early and leave late. He's not fighting the awkward banger he'd be facing in Mayorga. While Mayorga knows how to slug, Wright knows how to box.

It means Wright doesn't have to pack his passport the day he leaves for the fight. He won't have to hire an interpreter, change his currency, drive on the left side or learn how to eat and pronounce strange food. Of Wright's 49 fights, 20 have required extra paperwork and extra-long plane rides. He's fought in eight different countries and on four different continents.

No wonder no one over here knows who Winky Wright is.

Finally, this fight means that with the right money and for the right reasons, two guys in the same weight class holding different world titles, can come to an understanding that meeting inside the ring to decide who is the real champion makes all the sense in the world.

The sad thing is, it took an upset by another fighter in a different weight class - Spinks - to finally make it happen.