

World Domination Will be Halted.

Written by Steve Kim

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The most recent HBO promotion run on their network has both Vitaly Klitschko and his brother Wladimir, on a secluded island, plotting world domination of the heavyweight division. The two hulking Ukrainians laugh maniacally as they plot out supremacy in boxing's marquee division like Lex Luther did in Superman comic strips.

All this for a pair of brothers, who before Wlad's blowout of Fabio Moli, had lost both their fights in 2003. Wladimir, thought to be the better of the two brothers, was shockingly halted by Corrie Sanders in two rounds in March. Three months later, Vitaly would be much more valiant against Lennox Lewis, in losing via cuts in six rounds in Los Angeles.

But in this losing effort, the Klitschko name was redeemed and HBO is back on the bandwagon as Vitaly faces Kirk Johnson- who ironically, was the one who pulled out of that June date against Lewis with a pectoral injury, opening the door for Klitschko to face Lewis instead.

Now, Vitaly takes on Johnson at the famed Madison Square Garden on Saturday. And it says here, that the Klitschko family ends up at 1-3 on the year. Yes, I'm calling for a Johnson upset and I'm not the only one.

" There's a lot of reasons," pointed out noted trainer and ESPN2 color analyst, Teddy Atlas. Who has intimate knowledge of Johnson, as he trained him for a few fights in the late 90's." One of them is that he's got talent at that upper echelon and the upper echelon of boxing isn't what it used to be, that's another reason. He's got speed and good power and I think he's possibly got a real good situation where he's got a fighter who might be looking past him in the true sense of the word. I think Klitschko in a certain way was fighting for vindication and he got that in the Lewis fight."

Prior to the fight with Lewis, the Klitschko's, although physically gifted, were derided for their ignominious losses to the likes of Ross Puritty and Chris Byrd. They were derisively nicknamed the 'Quitcho's' by their detractors and thought to be classic front-runners. But Vitaly's brave performance has gone a long way in changing that perception.

" Even though he lost that fight, he got vindication, that he has heart and that he can keep his head up now and not be embarrassed by what people were saying about him and his brother.

" And in certain ways he won the big fight even in losing that fight- he won that moment," points out Atlas." And I think that this is a perfect trap fight for him and a perfect sandwich fight for Johnson because Klitschko probably is going to look at Johnson as a guy who he can make submit, probably a guy who when he's had pressure put on him, he's fallen short and he's under-achieved and in some ways even given in to a certain degree. I think some people think that."

And for good reason, Johnson has never been a guy known for an abundance of heart and

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fortitude. At times he has taken the path of least resistance during fights and he didn't exactly put himself up for a Purple Heart in his DQ loss to John Ruiz in 2001, either. But if Klitschko think he can just walk through Johnson with no repercussions, that could be just the opening that Johnson needs.

" I think Klitschko's probably going to think that he just has to walk in and put pressure on him a lil' bit like Oleg Maskaev a couple of years ago," said Atlas, referring to Johnson's win over the Russian in 2000, who enjoyed early success only to run into a big punch from Johnson that effectively ended the fight early on." And I think that's very dangerous with anybody at this level. But I think it's very dangerous with a guy like Johnson, who throws sneaky, quick punches, he throws good counter-punches and the kinda punches that can catch you by surprise and I think it may be the perfect situation for that to happen.

" I think if Klitschko just comes walking in, looking to just put pressure on this guy and just thinking that in his own way, he's achieved what he's had to achieve, he might not be mentally and maybe even technically, but especially ready for the fight it might end up becoming."

Another important factor in this fight is that there might not be that much difference between the two fighters. The reality is that while Klitschko was gallant against Lewis and it was an exciting fight, it wasn't exactly a thing of beauty, 'the Thrilla in Manila' it wasn't. And Klitschko could have caught a Lewis that had either turned old, didn't prepare, or a combination of both.

" That's one of the reasons I also like Johnson's chances," Atlas agreed." I like them because I think he's going to have Klitschko in a certain way that's mentally he's already there and that he's already achieved something and looking past him a lil' bit. And also he got more credit than he deserved in that fight, I agree 100-percent. I believe quite honestly that he might have gotten stopped if the fight didn't get stopped.

While Klitschko was ahead on all three scorecards after six rounds against Lewis, he was also hurt in the last round and badly cut over his left eye. He may have been leading, but he certainly wasn't dominating the heavyweight champion.

" Everybody was screaming he was ahead on the scorecards and that he was going to get to Lewis. I saw it completely different," Atlas says." I saw a bad Lewis, I wont deny that, but Klitschko sure as heck did not look like any kind of Joe Louis, lets be honest here. Both of them were very sloppy, technically you could give them both F's and D's, at the best. I mean they were terrible."

It was indeed more barroom fight, than classic boxing.

" I mean if you walked into a room and just saw that fight taking place and you didn't know who they were, you'd think they were sub-novice Golden Glovers the way they were throwing punches," said a blunt Atlas, of that fight." So did they have resolve, did they have stoutness of heart and all that? Yeah, they had all those things that experienced guys have but as far as the form and technique, it was horrendous."

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And Atlas believes that the fight getting halted when it did, was the best thing to ever happen to Klitschko.

" I don't go by the fashionable things that people were saying. I saw that the worst had happened already to Lewis and now, Lewis' experience was taking over and he was gonna get to this guy," said Atlas." That he was starting to get himself together and that this guy had done his best work and if anything, that he was going to start to be tested and perhaps start to fade a lil' bit. And I think the worst was ahead of Klitschko, the best had happened to him already but I think the worst was in front of him."

And that's precisely why I'm tabbing Johnson to upset Klitschko and halt the world domination of the Klitschko's. One guy who is being a bit overrated and another guy who is probably a big underrated. One guy who's coming off of a big fight and another, who lost a chance at his and is now getting it against the guy who took his place.

All this adds up to a Johnson win.