Heavyweight contender Brian “The Beast” of Butler, Pennsylvania, was as shocked as anyone when he was selected to be the opponent for three-time heavyweight title challenger Axel Schulz’s comeback after nearly seven years on November 25.

The 31-year-old Minto couldn’t have cared less that the fight was in the 38-year-old Schulz’s home country of Germany, where Schulz, having been more than competitive against the likes of George Foreman, Francois Botha, and Michael Moorer, had an iconic following.

“I went there with nothing to lose and everything to gain,” said Minto. “There was no pressure on me at all. All of the pressure was on him.”

Schulz’s braintrust seriously underestimated the skills and desire of Minto, who scored a sensational sixth round stoppage over Schulz. Cynics might believe that the win over Schulz is meaningless because the now retired Schulz, whose final record is 26-5-1 (11 KOS), had not fought since 1999 when he was stopped in eight rounds by Wladimir Klitschko, but Minto sees things differently.

“I wasn’t brought to Germany to beat Axel Schulz,” said Minto. “Schulz was a great fighter and he was tough and he always had a good chin. He had only been down once in his career and that was against Klitschko. It took Klitschko eight rounds to stop him, and I stopped him in six.”

The only loss on Minto’s 27-1 (16 KOS) record is a split decision to the still cagey former champion Tony Tubbs in December 2004. While he hasn’t beaten any world-class opponents, he has looked impressive in twice stopping Vinny Maddalone. Their first fight, which ended in the tenth round in July 2004, was a candidate for Fight of the Year.

Minto says the Tubbs fight was a great learning experience for him. But the win over Schulz, he believes, will enhance his career immeasurably. At just 5’11 and about 220 pounds, he is smallish by today’s heavyweight standards, but Minto believes he measures up just fine against the behemoths that populate the division.

“I’m a throwback heavyweight, I think I fare well against anybody,” said Minto, the married father of two children. “I have so much movement, I have power in both hands, and I have a great defense. I can move, I’m always in shape, and I’m very busy. I don’t match up size-wise, but skill-wise and heart-size I think I match up with anybody.”

One person who agrees wholeheartedly with that assessment is Calvin Brock, who recently failed in his bid to wrest Klitschko’s IBF title. Brock and Minto are both trained by Tommy Yankello and have sparred quite a bit over the years.

“He’s a real fighter,” said Brock. “He’s not easily intimidated and what he lacks in size he makes up for in heart.”

Minto would love to return to Germany to fight Klitschko, who is probably a bigger draw there than he is anywhere else. Or he would like to tangle with the comebacking former light heavyweight champion Dariusz Michalczewski, another popular German who had expressed an interest in fighting Schulz if he had won.

Asked what he would do differently from what Brock did against the 6’7” Klitschko before getting pole-axed in the seventh round, Minto made it sound simple.

“I’d move my head a lot more and get to the inside,” he explained. “Fighting him on the inside, I’d chop the tree down. Just get in there, be busier. Don’t stay on the outside because if he catches you, you see what happens.”

Before Minto tangles with anyone else inside the ring, he has to contend with promoter Dino Duva outside of it. They are engaged in a vicious legal battle that is already been fought in the media.

Duva claims that he has an ironclad contract to promote Minto. However, Minto says that his manager, Pat Nelson, has been arranging all of his fights and Duva breached his contract, therefore making it null and void and giving him free agent status.

“He never paid me the right amount of minimums, except for one fight,” explained Minto. “My manager has gotten me all my fights, so basically I’ve been fighting on other people’s cards while Dino was taking money off of me. So it doesn’t round out to me. He slithers.”

Moreover, he says, Duva did not fulfill his commitment on the number of fights he got for him. Nor did he receive a certified contract from Duva that he says was due him by October 18.

“As far as I’m concerned, I’m a free agent and I’m shopping around,” said Minto. “Dino Duva can sue President Bush for all I care. I’m ready to go to court because I know I will win my case.”

Minto has no regrets about his public airing of this dispute because he says Duva lobbed the first punches on the Internet.

“That is why I trashed him in the media and let everyone know what the real story was,” said Minto. “He has never done right by me yet.”

Not surprisingly, Duva sees things much differently. “I hope Brian wakes up, does the right thing and avoids having to pay legal fees for something he’s going to lose,” said Duva, who recently sold half of his business to Don King.

“I’m not going to glorify the various outrageous charges Brian has been making toward me, but it makes me sick that the great sport of boxing is in a very litigious mode right now. But when people pay no attention to contracts and basically dare you to sue them, what else can you do? I feel very secure in my integrity and the way I conduct business with fighters.”

Sounds like business as usual in boxing. Hopefully, legal issues won't keep Minto out of the mix for long. He has the potential to be the sleeper of the division, because chances are the much bigger heavyweights will take him for granted.

On a good night, it is conceivable that Minto could sneak away with a title belt around his waist. He has already publicly called out Klitschko, who was seated in the front row at the Garry-Weber Stadium in Halle for the Schulz fight.

"He didn't like that," said Minto. "He went woooooo, like a little kid who was scared would do."

If it is determined that Minto is in fact a free agent, Minto would be a very viable challenger for Klitschko's title. As popular as the Ukrainian giant is in the Deutschland, Minto also won over a legion of fans by defeating Schulz.

"With all the people that were mobbing me after the fight asking for autographs and pictures, I had to have security guards taking me around," said Minto. "I believe that now I will be a big draw over there too."