

Oleg Maskaev vs. Borat: Who's The Best Known Kazakh?

Written by Michael Woods

Monday, 11 December 2006 19:00

He is the second most well known person from Kazakhstan in the minds of United States citizens, and Oleg Maskaev is quite a bit more beloved in his homeland than is Borat.

Maskaev, the 37-year-old Kazakh who lives in California and owns the WBC title belt, traveled back to his old stomping grounds to defeat Nigerian challenger Peter Okhhello on Sunday evening.

It was the first world title fight in Russia, and according to Maskaev's co-manager Fred Kesch, who traveled with Team Maskaev to Russia, Maskaev was quite the hit. Now, the boxer grew up in the glorious nation of Kazakhstan, which is actually about 1,400 miles from Moscow, where he won a UD12 against Okhhello. And just between us, the Russians actually conquered Kazakhstan in the 1700s, and folded that clan into the Soviet empire in 1936, but bygones are bygones. The Russians embraced Maskaev, and he embraced them back.

Team Maskaev hopped on a plane and touched down in Russia on Nov. 27. Manager Kesch and promoter Dennis Rappaport, along with Maskaev, trainer Victor Valle and sparring partner Zuri Lawrence were all impressed by Russia, which is morphing into a cosmopolitan hotbed as rubles from oil money are flying hot and heavy.

Tix to see Maskaev at the Olympisky Arena in Russia moved quicker than ducats to see Madonna and McCartney, Kesch tells TSS, and the boxer was treated warmly wherever he went. He trained, Kesch says, at a children's fight gym, and the little ones were all over Oleg like jimmies on an ice cream cone. About 50 of them would grab their jump ropes and join Maskaev in skipping whenever the heavyweight grabbed his rope. The adult and the kids would keep skipping, with no one wanting to give up first.

Maskaev, Kesch tells TSS, also enjoyed touching base with relatives from his native turf. His dad, Alex, came from Kazakhstan to see his boy fight. He had never seen Oleg fight as a pro, so that was a special treat.

And even though everyone wanted to toast Oleg with vodka shots, Kesch says, the boxer didn't overindulge. Even though Okhhello is not a highly regarded boxer, Maskaev wasn't about to fritter away his title, which came to him in such improbable fashion, years after any and all pundits had relegated him to the scrapheap.

Team Maskaev soaked up the local atmosphere, attending the Bolshoi Ballet, and a music festival. The boxer received an award from the Republic of Mordovia, which is his father's country of origin, and he received Russian citizenship, to bookmark his US papers.

The atmosphere fight night was electric, Kesch reports. Ruble-laden high rollers ponied up around \$3,000 for ringside seats, and Kesch was struck by the fans' decency. That contrasted with the vibe in Hamburg in 2005, when the German fans left Kesch cold as they reacted with

Oleg Maskaev vs. Borat: Who's The Best Known Kazakh?

Written by Michael Woods

Monday, 11 December 2006 19:00

disdain when their guy, Sinan Samil Sam, lost a UD12 to Maskaev. Vitali Klitschko and the Giant Valuev were on hand in Moscow to scout Maskaev, and Kesch is hoping that he and Rappaport can cobble a deal with Wladimir Klitschko for a partial unification bout, before Maskaev would be due to fight the Samuel Peter/James Toney victor. Maskaev escaped the Okhhello fight with minimal wear and tear; he needed one stitch to aid the healing in a tiny tear over his left eyebrow.

Team Maskaev got some heat for choosing the 34-year-old Okhhello, now 18-5, for Oleg's first defense. But, Kesch tells TSS, James Toney would have been in the ring with Maskaev had he not chosen to tussle with Peter again.

And if Maskaev can hook up with Klitschko, and continue his improbable turnaround story, he will certainly supplant Borat as the best known Kazakh in the United States.