

A Fight To Define History

Written by Zhenyu Li

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Joe Calzaghe and Mikkel Kessler are not two household names outside the boxing community, but their epic unification battle on November 3 will be the one that storms the world of boxing.

The "Pride of Wales" and the "Viking Warrior", because of their division and locations, don't have a worldwide fan base. They fight in a class that packed with very few American superstars and Pound for Pound favorites.

The super middleweight division, which was established in 1984, lacks the rich history that helps define the classic weight classes, such as the middleweight division and the light heavyweight division. Being sandwiched between the two classics, the 168lb division has often been considered by some as nothing more than a rest home for those aged middleweights who get blown up in weight or a safe house for those shot light heavyweights who could no longer make the cut. With no undisputed champions in its 23 years of history, the reputation of this "newcomer" is further undermined.

Although Calzaghe and Kessler are superstars in their respective home country, fighting largely in UK and Denmark hindered them from gaining more popularity worldwide.

China Central Television (CCTV), China's largest national TV network, will not air the super middleweight unification showdown live between longtime WBO King Joe Calzaghe and WBA/WBC reigning champion Mikkel Kessler, according to its preview. Instead, the TV network will fill the gap with a super featherweight bout, which pits two little men, Juan Manuel Marquez and Rocky Juarez, against each other.

Does it manifest the issues of television broadcasting, or the lack of world influence, at least in China, of the name Joe Calzaghe and Mikkel Kessler?

Holyfield vs. Tyson, Mayweather vs. De La Hoya, even Mormeck vs. Bell were shown live on CCTV. But the name Calzaghe and Kessler just couldn't ring their bells.

In my standpoint, the upcoming showdown between the two undefeated super middleweights is one of the most significant fights the sport of boxing has had in years. Not only does the fight have all the makings of a classic, but it's a fight to define history.

The Makings Of A Classic

A championship unification battle between two undefeated pugilists is bound to be intriguing, no matter what division they are fighting in. This is especially true when both fighters possess superb boxing skills.

The 35-year old Calzaghe, whose perfect record stands at 43-0 with 32 KOs, is a very gifted veteran with some blazing hand speed and nifty footwork. He can unload combinations with

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precise accuracy. When you saw him throw over 100 punches in the very first round against fellow prospect Mark Delaney, send the then WBO champion Chris Eubanks to the deck in just 15 seconds and outbox the overmatched American would-be-star Jeff Lacy in a lopsided one-man show, you would have nothing to say but marvel with your mouth wide open at his phenomenal output, superior tenacity and sensational adaptability.

The 28-year old Kessler who registered an impressive record of 39-0, 29 KOs is an extremely skilled budding star with stunning power in both hands. His stand-up European fighting style makes him more comfortable boxing on the outside behind a stinging left jab. He won the WBA crown by an eighth round TKO over the mediocre Manny Siaca on November 12, 2004 and defended that title four times before picking up the WBC title with a brutal third round stoppage of the German Markus Beyer last year in October. In his latest fight, Kessler showed off a remarkable left jab followed by a solid right in pounding out a twelve round unanimous decision victory over the then undefeated iron-chinned Librado Andrade.

Calzaghe, who possesses an aggressive southpaw style has the edge in experience, hand speed and footwork while Kessler, the combo puncher who is always willing to trade, is younger, more solid and powerful. This is a beautiful mixture of styles between the old leopard and the young lion, which makes it one of the most anticipated boxing matches the world has to offer.

A Fight To Define History

Throughout the brief history of the super middleweight division, there has never been one unified champion. Sure, greats like Roy Jones, James Toney, Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns have competed and won world titles at this weight class, but they just roamed around before moving up to the light heavyweight division, and none of the four aforementioned masters had ever been the undisputed champion in the 168lb division.

Since the departure of Roy Jones and James Toney and the retirement of Chris Eubank, Steve Collins and Nigel Benn, the super middleweight division had been occupied by a bunch of mediocre champions such as Byron Mitchell, Robin Reid, Markus Beyer and Manny Siaca. Only Calzaghe has looked like a worthy champion and has been considered the best in the division. However, for his 10-year reign as the WBO king, he has landed only one significant bout, that is the WBO/IBF unification showdown with the muscular yet one-dimensional Jeff Lacy.

Now, the time has come. If the number one of the division beats the number two, Calzaghe will not only become the greatest champion the division has ever had, but also surpass Larry Holmes and Bernard Hopkins in title defenses as he successfully defends his WBO title for the 21st time, that is, only four fights to go to before breaking Joe Louis's 25 consecutive title defenses record.

Come on Joe. Catch it. The history will be yours!

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