

## OH NO! Bowe Is Back

Written by Phil Woolever  
Thursday, 18 December 2008 19:00

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THE GONE ZONE OF AULD LANG SYNE - There are new years still soon upcoming, and old years long gone.

For fighters who were once near immortal like Evander Holyfield and Riddick Bowe, ya gotta wonder how time has passed in their minds, hearts, and self perception.

For me, seeing Bowe fight last week in Mannheim and getting ready to head for Holyfield's hurrah in Zurich has been an emotional exercise in facing passed time and recalling two of my favorite boxers, both of whom I first encountered personally just after they had participated in the Box-offs and made their respective US Olympic Teams.

Whenever I start looking back with too glazed a vision, my wife starts singing Springsteen's "Glory Days", but now a melancholy song echoes about these particular times in a '60's tune by The Animals with the chorus: "When I was young things were more important, pain more painful, the laughter much louder.."

In case you haven't guessed, I'm not going to join the general chorus condemning or judging either old boy. No debates here either. To each their own, only best wishes at holiday time and all that.

That's not to say I don't understand the risks, falls from grace, or vastly changed status involved. I just hope both men find a healthy peace.

Holyfield had been much more in the public eye, so it was more of a double take moment when I saw Bowe in Berlin after the Vitali Klitschko - Samuel Peter fight. While almost an hour passed before Klitschko and his entourage made their entrance, I watched Bowe sitting over to the side, exchanging occasional greetings with the few people who recognized him. Bowe didn't look concerned about whether anyone noticed him or not.

As I drifted out I nodded to Bowe and he smiled the big grin I had seen before on numerous occasions, so I felt obliged to go over and say howdy.

"You look familiar," he said politely which showed he still had diplomatic sensibility, since I'm sure he had no clue who I was but recognized my media affiliation. I told him I'd spoken with him during his Olympic training in Arizona and covered his early fights in Vegas, again, he nodded like he remembered. I'm honored if he did.

We talked a bit, but I didn't ask the most obvious question about what he'd been up to because I'd heard murmurs of his plans and I was afraid of the answer. Besides, what right did I have to tell him I hoped he wouldn't come back.

Sure enough, I soon read he was fighting on the Klitschko-Rahman undercard.

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Maybe the K2 people are simply trying to be decent to an old hero. I heard Bowe made around 20,000 euro (over 25k in US bucks), more than a fair payday for the match he was in. Maybe K2 smell any easy payday for one of their young lions like 13-0 Mario Preskar, who looked great on both brothers' undercards.

There was plenty of negative speculation about whether or not Bowe would actually appear in the ring. He did, for better or worse, against a limited fellow named Gene Pukall, now listed at 14-13-2 (12).

The arena was about half full, at about 5,000 folks when Pukall entered looking like a fella in pajamas who got up for a drowsy visit to the bathroom. Pukall came into the ring with a black eye. It was the only damage he left with.

When Bowe came in the excellent announcer shouted "Please welcome Mr. Riddick Bowe!" like it was Elvis. There was a decently loud ovation as Bowe appeared with a full beard, in a bright white robe that covered an ample gut. The robe had the logo of a financial investment firm, something Bowe probably should have employed long ago.

Bowe had streaks of silverish gray in his hair, a mixture of age and vaseline.

The line about Oscar de la Hoya being unable to pull the trigger was often repeated weeks before. During the opening minutes against Pukall, Bowe couldn't even find a trigger to pull.

Bowe never connected with a solid punch in the early frames but Pukall's face was red from the impact of his arms being pushed back by blocked punches. Pukall got emboldened and tried to throw inside more but action was scarce and the crowd was silent until Lennox Lewis was introduced after second round began. The image of Bowe throwing Lewis's eventual WBC belt into the trash came back to haunt the scene.

Bowe faced another small moment of truth as Pukall backed him to the ropes and won the second frame.

Bowe fired stiffer jabs after that, some pretty decent, as the first popgun exchanges of the bout occurred in round three.

In the fourth, Bowe scored a knockdown with a good, short left hook and by the sixth his jab actually landed pretty well.

As the fight ended, there was even a weak chant going for Bowe, who smiled for a second like the old days. It wouldn't be a lie to call it an moral victory, but it would probably be false to call it a hopeful sign.

After the fight the positive spin was that Bowe looked OK against a guy almost ten years younger.

While this is in no way an endorsement of any such engagement, it looked like there's a decent chance Bowe could provide the audience with a more satisfying spectacle against one of the

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Klitschkos in a short, dramatic last stand than the petered out Peter or the rockabye Rahman.

In the often cruel terms of audience appreciation, witnessing a once elite world class fighter get creamed could be more bang for the buck than a drawn out, often monotonously unspectacular pounding like the Klitschko brothers' most recent outings.

When I saw Bowe cream Herbie Hide and Jorge Luis Gonzales, he was probably better than any big man I've ever seen except Larry Holmes, and as far as I'm concerned, on his best night Holmes could have taken anyone in the history of the division.

So after Bowe beat Holyfield, my hero, I figured Bowe could be the best of all time, including then great Mike Tyson, who looked awesome in fights against Frank Bruno or Trevor Berbick but not so against Tony Tucker or Bonecrusher Smith.

Back on the subject of classic tunes, the standard at many a new year is "Auld Lang Syne", meaning "long long ago" and believed to have been written by Scottish poet Robert Burns around 1788. One of the choruses could apply to Bowe and Holyfield.

We have run about the slopes  
And picked the daisies fine  
But we've wondered many a weary foot  
Since auld lang syne

I think about a few times I was sitting alone in tempory portable structures in back of the brand new Mirage Casino, talking about things besides boxing with team Bowe, which included the late, great Eddie Futch and Rock Newman.

There have been and will be many and many more damning indictments of Bowe and Holyfield, but I hear an old line in Donovan's song "Atlantis" - "...though Gods they were."

I hope someday Bowe and Holyfield are happy, relatively healthy old men undamaged by current pursuits, sitting in the proverbial rocking chairs looking back at the glory they shared.

Whatever they may be or become, in terms the sporting life's peaks, there ain't many others who can honestly say they deserve to sit in the same room at the old heroes home.

And yes, when they introduce Holyfield Saturday night, I'll do like I did when they introduced Bowe, breaking my usual neutral policy of press row silence, cheering for the old days.