

What Was Kevin Johnson Thinking During Klitschko Bout?

Written by Frank Lotierzo

Monday, 14 December 2009 18:00

For the first three rounds, I wondered what Kevin Johnson 22-1-1 (9) was doing. Then, with Vitali Klitschko 39-2 (37) clearly in distress, tired, having shoulder problems, and starting to bust up, I figured that Johnson had things figured out. By the 9th round, where Vitali could see the opposite shore within reach, I went back to wondering what Johnson was doing. Obviously Johnson had no intention of putting forth a winning effort and lost a lopsided 12-round unanimous decision. Two judges scored the fight 120-108 and the saw it 119-109 (I had it 120-108 Klitschko).

What's going on with today's heavyweights? On a night when WBC heavyweight title holder Vitali Klitschko looked older, slower and more vulnerable than he's looked in a long time, Kevin Johnson fought with the passion and intensity of a complacent church mouse.

It's easy to say that a fighter is awful and shouldn't even be in the ring challenging for a piece of the fractured heavyweight title, but that's a shallow thought. However, watching Johnson's futile effort trying to relieve Klitschko of his WBC title makes you wonder if he really had any interest in the outcome of the fight. But when you think and realize that Johnson probably prepared for close to two months for the fight realizing that it was an opportunity of a lifetime; there's no way you can accept the thought that he flew to Switzerland with the sole purpose of just trying to go the distance with Vitali and losing the fight. And if you don't accept that thought, what could it be that caused Johnson to put forth such an inept effort?

At one time I was of the belief that both Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko are stronger and punch much harder than they appear to from ringside or watching them on television. Remember how much bravado David Tua had before he fought Lennox Lewis? Yet ended up fighting at a measured pace after being touched a few times and feeling Lewis's power. After finding out how dangerous it was and how much it hurt to go after Lewis, Tua fought with reservation for the duration of the fight and not the reckless abandon he promised. So it's easy to fathom how both Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko are the reason as to why often times their opponents don't put up much of a fight after being inside the ring with them for a few rounds and look to survive because it hurts a lot less than fighting and trying to win.

The problem with that is, why fight if you're worried about getting hurt or embarrassed? Fighters know when they step into the ring exactly what's at risk. If you've gone as far as to make the commitment to get inside the ring and fight your way up to the highest level in the sport; why not give yourself the best possible shot you have to win the bout and maintain some respect for yourself, the fans and your opponent?

It's unfathomable how some fighters do themselves a bigger dis-service and stunt their careers more so by just showing up and fighting not to get knocked out or to survive. In the end don't you respect Trevor Berbick and his effort against Mike Tyson more than you do Kevin Johnson and his undertaking versus Vitali Klitschko? Sure - Berbick looked bad falling down a couple times via one Tyson left-hook, but at least he tried to take it to Mike before he was caught by

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Tyson's left hook on the temple. Trevor knew when he stepped into the ring with Tyson that he had no chance of out-boxing him. So he said to himself, "If I'm gonna lose my title in this fight, at the least I'm going to go down fighting to hold on to it instead of running and just handing it away to my opponent." Only clowns wouldn't see Berbick's effort against Tyson as a genuine attempt to do the one thing that would have given him a chance. So he winds up looking 100 times better than Johnson did last night.

Compare that to Kevin Johnson who never made a serious run at Klitschko during the bout until the last round was winding down. And in spite of Johnson not presenting Vitali with any serious resistance, he showed Kevin more respect than he earned. Klitschko seldom threw more than three punches at a time while he had Johnson against the ropes. And Johnson proved he was a durable opponent and was never hurt by Klitschko, but offered nothing offensively other than his straight left hand counters with nothing coming behind them in succession. Even more amazingly is the fact that Klitschko's clubbing over hand rights aimed mostly to the head were enough to keep Johnson on the retreat and fighting off his back foot.

The only punch that Johnson threw with any regularity was his left-jab, but Klitschko leans back after he punches and Johnson wasn't willing enough to step towards him with the thought of trying to land something of consequence. It's no secret for any heavyweight fighting either Klitschko circa 2009-2010, that they must step out of their comfort zone to have any legitimate chance to beat either one of them.

Vitali Klitschko is more than just a big man who fights professionally. He knows exactly how to use his size/strength and how to force his opponent to fight from their weakness and in a defensive posture. But every fighter regardless of how big or great they are, is vulnerable or somewhat neutralized by something. You would think after having years of watching Vitali fight and him never deviating from what he does when he's in the ring, Kevin Johnson and his brain-trust would've had a clue as to how to somewhat nullify him. It's not like Johnson was getting beat up or worked over as the fight progressed - and he was facing Vitali on a night in which he didn't bring his A-game.

One thing is for sure; professional boxing is not a defensive sport. A fighter needs defense to win, but he can't win fighting defensively. It bothers me that no one seems to want the title anymore. Even Vitali could have been talked into giving it up last night, if only Johnson knew how to do it.

What was Kevin Johnson thinking?

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