

Written by Phil Woolever
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photo of Boystov by Andre Latendorf

Universum Promotions re-emerged into the lush German boxing landscape last Saturday, with a strong card which featured most of the top talent in their stable. While the stars' selected opposition didn't always provide the best possible matchups, most of the competition was of good quality.

It was a card with a little bit of everything you might expect at a high-class club show. In this case the club, Dima Sports Center, was a large scale health and training facility that held about

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555 fanatics, many of whom took their time getting seated, in contrast to usual German crowds at such events.

For headlining European titlist Alexander Dimitrenko, it was a stay busy assignment while he awaits what has now become an increasingly evasive opportunity against one of the Klitschkos. 6'7 Dimitrenko loomed large, but didn't do much to further his cause.

Coming into the fight, it seemed like Dimitrinko might be the best available contender for a Klitschko. It didn't seem that way after the fight with Sprott.

For returning boxers like female pound-4-pounder Ina Menzer or anxiously anticipated heavyweight Denis Boytsov, coming back from defeat or injury respectively, any win without negatives was welcome.

It looked like both fighters were following the dear, recently departed Mr. George Benton's "look good in the next fight" scenario. Neither looked bad. Neither looked great.

For 2008 heavyweight Olympic Gold Medalist Rakhim Chakhkiev, campaigning in the cruiserweight division, it looked like the first of many potential stolen shows before he's in the main event. Great prospects seen here.

Overall, the card featured a substantial amount of talent, and bodes well for Universum's resurgence if they can achieve bigger matchups in bigger venues. With the Klitschko's K2 Promotions covering mega-fights and Sauerland Events keeping a busy schedule of championship level events, not to mention the solid UK scene, marketplace competition for patrons in this slugging sector is pretty fierce. The good news is there is also enough of a very foundationally sound fan base in these parts to support many shows.

Much of Universum's hopes, along with a few of limited partner Golden Boy Inc's, rest on the formidable shoulders of Boytsov, who, on his best days against designated victims, resembled a pre-championship Mike Tyson in steamrolling straight men.

Boytsov had to catch his breath a couple times for all the thumps he applied to willing but overmatched American Matthew Greer, now 14-7. Greer more than earned his paycheck by continuing well past the point of a reasonable retirement in the corner. Boytsov, now 29-0 (24), looked like a menace, but couldn't always pull the trigger on his slingshot.

Boytsov's jab looked much improved, but he seemed hesitant to throw power shots after various hand problems kept him sidelined. The puncher's burden.

Greer gave it a shot but was rocked and reeling with a bloody nose almost immediately. Despite his bravery, Greer did not look at all happy between rounds at the probable prospect of more Boytsov. Greer's cornerman was accurate with lines like "You've got to go for broke, you ain't no punching bag." The crowd was entertained by what was often the lone voice in an otherwise almost silent hall. Greer fought back for half a round, then started catching mortars from underneath. An accumulation of leather put Greer down in the fifth, and he was rescued by ref

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Frank Maas for an official TKO 6th at 1:25.

As a reality check, it was similar to Boytsov's tutorial battle with Vinnie Maddalone, a couple years back. Greer did not look as good as Maddalone in any department except professionalism and courage. Those are important departments, but not enough to make it look like Boytsov had advanced much since then. One step at a time, but at 6'1, Boytsov better regain his intensity if he expects to compete with the biggest boys. A bout against Tomasz Adamek would be a primo punching party.

Menzer, who at her peak was as good as any female boxer going, got back in the win column, but it did not look as easy as it appeared to the judges. Menzer faced "Bam Bam" Nunez in her first fight since dropping her title to Jeannine Garside last July.

The smattering of applause the women received was not impolite, just indicative of how many empty seats there were early in the program. It was the smallest crowd Menzer has performed before in years. Menzer appeared smaller than the rowdy Nunez, but quicker. Nunez earned the first frame by virtue of responding to the aggressive Menzer with grazing counter-combinations.

You could tell Menzer was having issues, by the forceful manner she pushed down on Nunez during many clinches. Nunez didn't land as much, but seemed to be controlling most of the tempo. By the third two minute round, Menzer got on her toes and got busier with good lefts. Nunez made mocking faces when stung, another crowd amusing tidbit. Official scoring was a too big margin for Menzer at 80-72 and 79-73 twice. I scored it a draw at 77-77.

"We do it again," said Menzer in response to Nunez's unbowed attitude. "Next time twelve."

Menzer, now 27-1 (10), may have to return to peak form to return as a top type draw. She still seems to have the necessary discipline and desire. If it will be enough against a confident Garside, who for whatever reasons hasn't fought since taking Menzer's belt, remains a question.

Dimitrenko, once a hyped future king, faced veteran Sprott, who once had title shot dreams of his own. Just Dimitrenko's luck that on a showcase night, 36 year old trialhorse Sprott decided to put forth one of his career best efforts.

That doesn't mean the contest was dramatic or inspiring. More that the well-conditioned Sprott simply refused to back down while Dimitrenko scored with consistent but largely unimpressive shots. Dimitrenko dominated for the most part, but he didn't do much to prove he was any sort of threat to the Klitschkos.

Even with a newly grown beard, 29 year old Dimitrenko still has a deceiving baby face. Sprott tried to muscle him around and the mauling tactic paid some dividends. By the tenth, Dimitrenko's right eye was visibly tenderized. Sprott kept wrestling as much as punching, and repeatedly forced the much larger Dimitrenko to the mat, which should have Dimitrenko's handlers concerned about his strength and stamina. Sprott lost two points down the stretch for such infractions. Dimitrenko took a wide 12 round decision, but it was a sidestep as much as an

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advance.

For his part, Chakhkiev , now 11-0 (9), was a near perfect example of effective aggression behind wicked body shots. He dropped Michael Simms, 21-15-2 (13), with a left just before the bell ending round two, and finally overwhelmed Simms, who had never been stopped, for an official TKO at 1:43 of the 4th.

Afterward Simms, who has faced top cruisers like Marco Huck, Yoan Pablo Hernandez and Matt Godfrey, stated that Chakhkiev is far stronger than any previous foe.

Sometimes the achievements of journeymen rumblers like Darnell Wilson, with a record of 24-12-3 (20) are under appreciated. Wilson's career has taken him places like Australia Russia and Singapore. Tonight in Germany, Wilson took a majority decision over Juan Carlos Gomez, 49-3 (37), who claimed a shoulder injury and probably saw the end of his fringe contender status.

For their part, Universum Promotions got back in the mix. They've got a ways to go before getting back to the top, but this card was a fine start overall, with solid German TV and internet coverage. With another show on the drawing board for this year, it will hopefully not be too long before Universum is a major player again.

With Boytsov, Dimitrenko, Menzer, and especially Chakhkiev at this pure pounding point the personnel and ingredients are definitely back in place.

Now, it's up to the matchmakers.

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