

Travis Kauffman Still Waiting On That Big Break He Needs

Written by Bernard Fernandez
Tuesday, 20 August 2013 13:42



Scan the top 15 ratings for the four most widely recognized world sanctioning bodies and you'll see that there isn't the shortage of U.S. heavyweights many believe to be the case. But most of the names listed belong to fighters over 30 years of age and, in the case of the highest-ranked American, Tony Thompson, over 40.

That whittles the supply of "young" American heavyweights – defined here as those on the

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sunny side of 30 – to three men who might or might not have the goods to represent a real challenge not only to reigning champions Wladimir and Vitali Klitschko, but to a glut of other Eastern Europeans who dominate the rankings.

Two of those heavyweights you probably know about. Deontay Wilder (29-0, 29 KOs) is 27, a bronze medalist at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and has won every one of his professional bouts by knockout, including a first-round starching of faded former WBO titlist Sergei Liakhovich on Aug. 9 in Indio, Calif., a fight which was televised by Showtime. Bryant Jennings (17-0, 9 KOs) is 28 and has been featured regularly in nationally televised scraps on NBC SportsNet, including a ninth-round stoppage of the aforementioned Liakhovich on March 24, 2012.

Then there is Travis Kauffman (24-1, 18 KOs). The Reading, Pa., fighter, who turns 28 on Wednesday, is not a former Olympian, hasn't had the benefit of recent TV exposure and has no really recognizable names on his resume. Maybe he is the best of the young American heavys, as his father-trainer-manager, Marshall Kauffman, insists, but there aren't many who have seen enough of him to objectively weigh in on the subject, despite Travis' No. 13 ranking from the WBA.

One thing is certain: No matter what happens Friday night at the Valley Forge (Pa.) Casino and Resort in suburban Philadelphia, few are apt to sit up and take notice. Kauffman is paired against 32-year-old journeyman Arron Lyons (12-12-1, 9 KOs) -- who'll be fighting for the first time in 16 months -- in a scheduled eight-rounder, and he'll be expected to take care of business swiftly and emphatically. Kauffman-Lyons ostensibly isn't even the main event of the evening; top billing is going to Naim Nelson (10-1, 1 KO), who defends his Pennsylvania lightweight title against Ryan Belasco (18-5-3, 3 KOs) in a scheduled six-rounder.

But those high-paying, high-visibility TV dates are hard to come by for someone who is not backed by a big-time promoter or manager, so Kauffman for now is obliged to play not only off-off-Broadway, but off-off-Broad Street (that's Philly, folks).

Kauffman, who was on the cusp of much bigger and better things four years ago, before he was stopped in the fourth round of a ShoBox-televised fight against Tony Grano, still believes it can happen for him, and that he is a more complete and naturally gifted fighter than either Jennings or Wilder.

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“I take nothing away from them, but I see so many things I could take advantage of if we fought,” Kauffman said. “Yeah, Wilder has a great jab and good power, but I think I’m better than him. Same thing with Jennings. I don’t consider Jennings to be so very talented, but his work ethic is unbelievable. He’s gotten as far as he has because he works so hard.”

Make no mistake, the 6-3½ Kauffman, who has fought at weights ranging from 221 pounds to 243, hasn’t always had the most disciplined approach to his craft. At one point between bouts, he allowed his weight to balloon to 310 pounds. The reformed bad boy – he has spent time in juvenile detention facilities and once was charged with statutory rape, although the charge eventually was dropped for lack of evidence – has had to deal with injuries (including two surgeries to his right hand and one to his left) and his less-connected handlers’ inability to secure the kind of fights he needs to get back into the limelight. He admits to occasional stretches of depression, none more severe than in the months after his powerhouse manager, Al Haymon, dropped him following the loss to Grano.

“It wasn’t so much that I lost,” Kauffman said of that fateful night of Sept. 18, 2009, in Indio, Calif. “It was more that Al Haymon turned his back on me. I had put my whole life into boxing and it felt like I lost it all in the blink of an eye. Let’s face it, Al Haymon was the one who was getting me that TV exposure in the first place. He’s got Floyd Mayweather. When he told me I could go all the way to the top, of course I believed him.”

Kauffman, who also had scored a third-round TKO of Malachy Farrell that was televised by ShoBox during his brief association with Haymon, suddenly found himself not only a step or two behind where he had been, but seemingly at the back of the line.

“Al Haymon had promised me that if I beat Tony Grano, my next fight, my coming-out party, would be on HBO for a minimum of \$100,000,” Kauffman recalled. “I live in the inner city of Reading, Pennsylvania. I was showing my kids (he had four at the time, including two stepchildren, a number which has since climbed to five) nice houses in the suburbs. So when I lost and Al turned his back on me, it was devastating.

“People tell you it’s just one loss, to forget about it and move on, but it’s not that easy. I really didn’t want to box no more. And it’s been an up-and-down battle ever since. I’ve had my share of injuries. Now it’s time to (crap) or get off the pot. Mentally, I feel as good as I did before the Grano fight, when I was the most talked-about American heavyweight besides Chris Arreola. But after I lost to Grano, it was like everybody forgot who Travis Kauffman was. I won’t lie to

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you, it hurt.”

Steve Farhood, the ShoBox commentator who was a ringside for Kauffman’s fights with Farrell and Grano, said he is disappointed that Kauffman crawled into a hole following the Grano fight instead of dusting himself off and getting right back to work, preferably in a rematch with his conqueror.

“He was in complete control against Grano, but as soon as things started going against him, it was over. He got stopped,” Farhood said. “I don’t want to make it sound too much like I’m taking a shot at the kid, but look at Seth Mitchell. When he got beat (by Johnathan Banks), he got right back in the ring with the fighter who had beaten him. And while he wasn’t particularly impressive, he was victorious. Kauffman would have shown me a lot more if he had rematched with Grano and won. Instead, he’s fought mostly fighters with losing records.

“You can tell a lot about a fighter by who his handlers put him in with. To this point, (a low level of competition) has been the knock against Deontay Wilder, and you can the same thing about Travis Kauffman.”

But it’s not really the same thing, is it? Mitchell, the former Michigan State linebacker, continued to have the Golden Boy promotional machine in his corner. Without Haymon’s managerial clout to open doors, Kauffman’s career became even more dependent on his dad, who freely admits he doesn’t have the resources to maneuver his son into more lucrative dates than the stay-busy kind he’s taking against Lyons.

“Travis’ biggest drawback, probably, is me,” said Marshall Kauffman, who also has trained former world champs Kermit Cintron and Hasim Rahman. “And the biggest positive for him probably is me, too. We’ve had to deal with that whole father-son, coach-boxer thing that sometimes gets in the way. I don’t think it’s as much of an issue as it used to be. A lot of those kinks have been ironed out over the years.

“But there’s only so much I can do on a limited budget. Look, I’d have Travis fight someone like Liakhovich any time, any place. But you have to have enough money to pay Liakhovich enough money to entice him into the ring. Same thing with Bowie Tupou, who Jennings beat. I just can’t afford to pay those guys enough to appear on a small club card with no TV, like I’m doing at

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Valley Forge.”

So Travis Kauffman is obliged to take another off-the-radar fight against Lyons, the latest in a line of opponents who pose no real threat to someone his admittedly biased father calls “by far the best American heavyweight out there.” Only eight of the fighters who have faced Kauffman have winning career records, and the cumulative of everyone he has fought is 277-304-23, with 194 wins inside the distance and 164 KO losses.

It’s not that Kauffman hasn’t mixed it up with higher-quality guys. He has sparred with, among others, Rahman, Arreola, Eddie Chambers, Oleg Maskaev, Dominick Guinn and Malik Scott. But sparring sessions aren’t the same things as fights that count, and Kauffman can only hope to catch the sort of break that Jennings did when, on short notice, he and Maurice Byarm found themselves in the main event of the first NBC SportsNet “Fight Night” card after an injured Chambers fell out.

So what’s needed for Travis Kauffman to again wangle his way into position to make some noise in a depleted heavyweight division that is literally crying out for a young American contender?

“Patience. Persistence,” said the father. “Something will open up, eventually. Of course, it can happen a lot quicker when you have a Top Rank or a Golden Boy or a Main Events behind you. But you also have to be smart about the choices you make.

“When Grano fell out of a fight with (Tomasz) Adamek, Travis got offered his spot, but he would have had only one week to get ready, and that wasn’t nearly enough time. Look, you always have to be ready for a chance like that, but you also have to make sure the reward outweighs the risk. Give Travis six to eight weeks to train and he’ll be only too glad to fight anybody.”

Travis said the mistake too many fighters make is to jump into a seemingly lucrative situation when the circumstances aren’t right.

“I have too much pride to take a fight on short notice when I’m not in shape,” he said. “I know a

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lot of guys who do that simply because they need the money. Do I need the money? Absolutely. Who doesn't need money? But I want to be heavyweight champion of the world. If I take a fight when I'm not ready and lose, I'll probably never get the right kind of opportunity again.

"Sometimes you feel, like, cursed. I got offered a fight with Seth Mitchell, but it was on the same day I underwent surgery on my right hand. So much for that.

"You almost feel like quitting sometimes, but I've never worked a 9-to-5. For me to give up boxing now and to try to find a regular job, with no experience, would be hard. I can't take care of five kids working at McDonald's. So what choice do I have except to keep pushing ahead?"

[Comment on this article](#)

Bernie Campbell says:

Mr Fernandez! Thanks for the token of appreciation regardin Kauffman in this article! But you need to address the issue of Why Samir Samil Sam's blip disappeared of the radar! And Why didn't he ever get any ink?

mortcola says:

I don't know a thing about Kauffman, except for the what the occasional write up tells me. Makes me sympathize - what does he do to prove himself, what does he do to give his kids a shot, what does a maybe-prospect with a decent number of fights, but against poor opposition, and lots of high-profile sparring, do to get a shot by one of the better promoters? Why does he not even get a chance to get EXPOSED as a punching bag, if not a real comer? I know the sleaze of the game as a fan, and I've had a chance to watch high-profile regional fights get made lately - but what's wrong with this picture?