

Is GGG P4P?

Written by Thomas Hauser
Tuesday, 05 November 2013 10:51



Times Square in New York City is often referred to as “the crossroads of the world.” On November 2nd, the crossroads moved nine blocks south to Madison Square Garden where Brooklyn and Kazakhstan converged for the middleweight title fight between Curtis Stevens and Gennady Gennadyevich Golovkin.

Golovkin was born in Kazakhstan in 1982. He won a World Amateur Boxing Championship in 2003 and a silver medal at the Athens Olympics a year later. The most reliable accounting of his amateur record is 345 wins against 5 losses. He has never been knocked down as an amateur or professional and is undefeated in 28 pro fights with 25 knockouts. He currently holds the WBA and IBO titles.

Outside the ring, Golovkin smiles a lot and has a gentle demeanor. On the street, he could pass for a computer geek. His first language is Russian, but he speaks fluent Kazakh and some German. In interviews with the American media, he sometimes waits for a question to be translated into Russian but answers in English.

Too many fighters want to live like rock stars when they reach the top. Golovkin’s life is focused on boxing, not partying or other distractions. His wife and four-year-old son live in Germany.

“I see them between my fights,” Gennady says. “I am lonely sometimes without them because I train in California. But my work is here. I like California. California is perfect for me and, I hope, some day for my family. Life for me is good now. I am happy.”

Golovkin doesn’t look like a world-class fighter, but he fights like one. His trainer, Abel Sanchez (who Gennady calls “coach”) likens his pupil’s relentless attack to that of Julio Cesar Chavez in

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his prime.

“Gennady is a joy to work with,” Sanchez says. “His mentality is about improving every day. My biggest problem is, I can’t get complacent. I have to make sure that I don’t become a fan.”

Golovkin in the ring is like a threshing machine cutting through a wheat field. Or a tank that’s firing live ammunition. Choose your metaphor. He’s exciting to watch, methodically destroys opponents, and has the highest knockout percentage of any current belt holder in boxing.

“I can throw ten punches very fast,” Gennady says, mimicking shoe shining. “Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r . . . But why throw ten punches when you can knock a man out with two?”

Some fighters keep the “0” on their record by avoiding other top fighters. To date, Golovkin hasn’t turned down a single opponent. He has always been willing to fight the best available opposition. But other fighters with belts and fighters who are in line to fight one of the other middleweight belt holders have distanced themselves from Gennady.

Also, Golovkin is under the promotional umbrella of K2 promotions. And while K2 managing director Tom Loeffler has worked hard to advance Gennady’s career, one can make the argument that Vitali and Wladimir Klitschko could and should be more supportive. Indeed, in the “About Us” section on the K2 website, Golovkin is listed after Johnathon Banks and Ola Afolabi.

Golovkin introduced himself to the American public with a fifth-round knockout of Grzegorz Proksa on HBO in September 2012. Knockouts of Gabriel Rosado and Matthew Macklin followed. The network then slated a November 2nd date for Gennady and needed an opponent. Curtis Stevens stepped into the void.

Stevens, age 28, has lived his entire life in Brooklyn. He turned pro in 2004 and came into the fight against Golovkin with a 25-and-3 record. Most his bouts were at light-heavyweight. He was undefeated with three first-round knockouts in four fights after going down to 160 pounds.

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There was a modest amount of trashtalk prior to Golovkin-Stevens; most of it from Curtis, who called Golovkin “an overrated hype job” and promised to “knock him the f--- out.”

That earned a rejoinder from Gennady, who observed, “Dangerous atmosphere, different style. I am sportsman. He has big mouth.”

“Gennady doesn’t get angry,” Abel Sanchez noted. “He gets focused.” Then Sanchez said of Stevens, “He’s going to get destroyed. He doesn’t belong in the ring with Triple-G. You’ve seen what Gennady has done so far. He can do that to anybody.”

That led Curtis to respond, “Abel saying I’m gonna get knocked out in three rounds. Abel saying I’m gonna get knocked out in six. Abel is stupid.”

Meanwhile, in a calmer moment, Stevens told writer Tom Gerbasi, “This is something that I dreamed about since I was eight years old and stepped in the ring for the first time. And to be here and to have it in my grasp, it’s amazing. I think about it every night. Some nights, there’s anxiety from thinking about it too much and I don’t get good. So in my mind, I’m saying, ‘You’ve just got to grab it. You’re either gonna give it up or go in there and take it right out of his hands.’ Come November 2nd, I’m gonna be great.”

Golovkin was a heavy favorite. Stevens is a puncher. But Gennady, who was coming into the fight riding a wave of fourteen consecutive knockouts, is a bigger puncher. Also, Golovkin had proven himself to be the more technically-proficient fighter of the two. And while no one has ever questioned Curtis’s courage, his chin was suspect.

Legendary cornerman Al Gavin once opined, “If you’re making a list of all the attributes a fighter needs, start with a chin. If you don’t have a chin, forget about being a fighter.”

Golovkin’s chin is the stuff of legends.

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Still, Stevens was coming to win. And during fight week, he projected a calm confidence.

“Golovkin a fighter,” Curtis acknowledged of his opponent. “He might not look like one outside the ring, but I know he’s good. With his knockout ratio and my knockout ratio, the way it’s supposed to go is, it won’t go twelve rounds. But I’m ready to go twelve if I have to. And he’s not used to fighting someone who hits as hard as me. All he’s fought is blown-up junior-middleweights. Now he’s fighting a bigger man who’s coming down in weight. People are saying he’s the best middleweight in the world. After I beat him, what does that make me?”

*

Golovkin arrived at his dressing room on the second floor of The Theater at Madison Square Garden on fight night at 8:05 PM. His brother (Max Golovkin) and two other team members were with him.

The room was small, roughly twelve feet squared with cream-colored cinderblock walls and a speckled-gray tile floor. A large blue-and-gold Kazakhstani flag hung from the wall above a rectangular plastic table. Seven folding metal chairs with black cushions and television cables taped to the floor made the space seem smaller than it was.

Gennady began doing stretching exercises. At 8:20, Abel Sanchez entered. The trainer had three fighters on the undercard, including heavyweight Mike Perez, who would be in HBO’s first televised fight of the evening. Sanchez would move back and forth between dressing rooms for much of the night.

Other members of Team Golovkin came and went. Gennady checked his cell phone for text messages. Music at a low decibel level sounded in the background; an eclectic mix ranging from a woman’s soft voice over a gentle rock beat to gangsta rap.

There was little conversation. Almost always, Gennady was on his feet, pacing, stretching. At one point, he sat down and massaged his own fingers, hands, and wrists. At nine o’clock, he took a milk chocolate Hershey bar out of his gym bag and peeled off the wrapper.

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“Is that for energy?” a state athletic commission inspector asked.

“No. I’m hungry, and it tastes good.”

All fighters are aware of the stakes involved when they fight; financially and in terms of their physical wellbeing. But in the hours before a fight, they process it in different ways. At a time when many fighters’ nerves are gyrating on the edge, Golovkin seemed calm and emotionally self-sufficient, almost serene.

Referee Harvey Dock came in and gave the fighter his pre-fight instructions.

“The three-knockdown rule is waived . . . The Unified Rules of Boxing are in effect . . . If your mouthpiece comes out, keep fighting until I call a lull in the action. You have two mouthpieces, correct?”

“Three,” Sanchez answered.

Abel wrapped Gennady’s hands.

There was more moving and stretching. But the stretching was becoming more vigorous. Golovkin lay down on a towel and contorted his body into positions that most people would find troubling. Then he rose, took a jar of Vaseline, and greased down his own face.

Sanchez gloved Gennady up. Max massaged his brother’s legs, back, and shoulders.

Golovkin’s eyes hardened. A transformation had begun. The gentle smile was gone. Now he

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was stomping around the room, growling, flexing his muscles.

Round one of Mike Perez vs. Magomed Abdusalamov came into view on a small television monitor. Sanchez had opted to remain with Golovkin. Ben Lira was the head man in Perez's corner.

Gennady hit the pads with Abel for thirty seconds. Each punch was thrown with technical precision and thudding power. Then he paced and stretched some more before hitting the pads for another thirty seconds. Finally, he slapped himself on the temple with closed gloves. Left, right, left, right. More than a tap.

He was ready.

Sanchez applied more Vaseline to Golovkin's face.

Perez vs. Abdusalamov dragged on.

"What round is it?" Abel asked

"Six."

Twenty minutes lay ahead before Gennady would leave for the ring. He paced, shadow-boxed, and paced some more.

Sanchez gave him a sip of water.

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Perez-Abdusalamov ended with Perez winning a unanimous decision. No one knew it at the time, but hours later, Abdusalamov would be in a coma in critical condition after emergency surgery to relieve bleeding and swelling in his brain.

Golovkin sat on a chair in a corner of the dressing room and bowed his head in concentration.

“It was for focus,” Gennady explained later. “This is a serious business. I understand my situation. It was for concentration in the fight. To concentrate on speed, power, and distance. To concentrate on what I must do to win for myself and my family.”

*

A casual observer who saw Golovkin and Stevens at the opening bell and knew nothing about either man might have thought that Gennady was a sacrificial lamb. Curtis was shorter but more visibly muscled with a menacing glare and heavily tattooed torso and arms. Stevens can beat a lot of middleweights, but Golovkin isn't one of them.

Gennady began by working off of, and controlling the fight with, his jab. Curtis cranked up left hooks from time to time but couldn't connect solidly. With thirty seconds left in round two, Golovkin fired a short compact textbook left hook that landed flush on Stevens's jaw and deposited him on the canvas.

Curtis struggled to his feet, dazed, and survived till the bell. Thereafter, he tried valiantly to work his way back into the fight. There was no quit in him. Late in round four, he flurried off the ropes and landed some good shots. Midway through round five, he scored with a solid hook and right hand up top followed by a hook to the body. But Gennady took the punches well and was soon stalking his man again.

It was the kind of fight that keeps fans on the edge of their seats. Both fighters were throwing bombs and both fighters were dangerous. It seemed as though – BOOM – at any moment, something might happen. But most of the “booms” were coming from Golovkin.

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Gennady showed once again that he's a complete fighter. His footwork is such that he all but glides around the ring. He's always looking to attack and do damage. He's relentless but not reckless and cuts off the ring well. His jab, straight right, hook to the head and body, and uppercut are all potent. Every punch in his arsenal has the potential to debilitate an opponent.

Stevens started round six aggressively. Then Gennady unloaded on him. Boxing demands courage of fighters, and Curtis showed it. But from that point on, Golovkin-Stevens was a one-sided display of brutal artistry.

"Compassion," Jimmy Cannon wrote decades ago, "is a defect in a fighter."

A minute and fifteen seconds into round eight, Golovkin landed two thudding hooks to the body that hurt Stevens. Curtis backed into the ropes, and Gennady battered him around the ring with sledgehammer blows to the head and body. Stevens refused to submit, but his cause was helpless.

At the end of the round, referee Harvey Dock followed Curtis to his corner and told trainer Andre Rozier, "That's it."

"Okay," Rozier responded.

The final "punch-stats" showed Golovkin outlanding Stevens by a 293-to-97 margin. And a lot of those 293 blows were particularly damaging.

So . . . How good is Golovkin?

The more people get to know him, the more they like him as a person and as a fighter. Most athletes, not just fighters, need some meanness in them to be great. Despite Gennady's

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gracious persona, the assumption is that there's some meanness there.

Golovkin has yet to fight an elite opponent. One can also make the argument that he doesn't move his head enough and gets hit more than he should. And as Sugar Ray Leonard noted years ago, "There's a way to beat everybody." Invincible warriors only exist in movies and novels.

That said; Gennady is a special fighter. One hopes that, in the not-too-distant future, he'll be in the ring with an inquisitor who has the ability to test him in a megafight commensurate with his talents.

Golovkin's best weight is 160 pounds.

"Right now," he says, "I am a middleweight. But this is boxing. For money, I would go to super-middleweight to fight Andre Ward. For money, I would fight Mayweather at 154 pounds."

But would Ward or Mayweather fight him?

Mayweather? No way.

Ward? We'll find out.

That, of course, leaves the lineal middleweight champion of the world, Sergio Martinez.

There are numerous similarities between Martinez and Golovkin. Both are dedicated professionals and superb fighters who honor boxing with their presence. They're gracious men who treat people with dignity and respect. Even their personal mannerisms are similar. The ready smile; the nod of the head when in agreement with something that someone else has

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said. One can imagine that, under different circumstances, they'd be friends.

Martinez is on the downside of his career. In recent years, his body has betrayed him. Sergio has earned the right to be called "middleweight champion of the world." But right now, Golovkin is the world's best middleweight and it's unlikely that Martinez will fight him.

Meanwhile, Golovkin is a reminder of the nobility of boxing at its best as contrasted with the duplicity and pettiness of so many of the people who connive and preen around fighters. That nobility was on display in the ring at Madison Square Garden on November 2nd. And it was evident again in Gennady's dressing room an hour after the fight when the door opened and a short stocky man wearing a navy-blue hoodie and dark glasses to obscure the bruises around his eyes walked in.

Curtis Stevens extended his hand to Gennady Golovkin and spoke his next words with sincerity and respect: "Champ, you're a great fighter. Congratulations."

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thouser@rcn.com. His most recent book (*Straight Writes and Jabs: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing*) has just been published by the University of Arkansas Press.

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Spinach Chin says:

Take it easy now...Sergio Martinez is still the champ, and his resume towers over that of GGG's. To hear the chatter you'd think GGG has already beaten the man! Give Martinez a chance to make his argument in the ring.

brownsugar says:

GGG is the genuine article... Quality and quantity in every punch. Excellent balance and punch selection. Flows forward or reverse as needed...applies the smartest pressure in boxing...

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Would destroy Martinez and every opponent he ever fought and every opponent their opponents ever fought.

Has a don't get mad...get evenand then get ahead mentality. I only wish I could watch him fight the ATG middleweights of all time.... Think I'm joking? ...GGG will get there.

Radam G says:

YUP! GGG is no doubt P4P. And he beats Sergio Martinez by KAYO! SerMar is an illusion of greatness. He's
AIGHT! Holla!

amayseng says:

ggg definitely in the lb4lb argument. i place mayweather, ward, hopkins and sergio martinez ahead of him for now. that is for now. but ggg def in the top 5 argument.

ggg's resume may not pass the comparison test, but his fighting ability passes the eye test.

The Shadow says:

Yeah, P4P ability -- which is who beats who if everyone was the same size -- has little to do with longevity, resumes, key wins and the like.

The media mistake the pound-for-pound concept grossly. What they're doing is ranking people similarly to the ATP rankings in tennis where you accumulate points over a period of time.

Why else can anyone justify ranking Donaire over Rigondeaux when he outweighed Rigo by 20 pounds but got totally outclassed on skill alone -- that should be the epitome of pound-for-pound quality.

Using the ATP/WTA system, sure, I can justify having guys in there on merit and resumes. Why else is 90% of the P4P list 30 years or older?

What a pound-for-pound ranking is is mythical matchmaking based on skill. While one certainly should validate said skill against quality opposition, there is no way one can credibly say that a Donaire should be ranked over Rigo whose skill is clearly levels above.

So based on that dimension, I think the list looks something like this:

- 1) Mayweather
- 2) Rigondeaux
- 3) Ward
- 4) Donaire
- 5) Bradley
- 6) JMM

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- 7) Pacquiao
- 8) Sergio
- 9) Vitali Klitschko
- 10) Adrien Broner

WITH THAT SAID, looking at his skill set and consistency (not accumulated merit but consistency demonstrating superior skill), you can easily make a fair case for GGG on that list anywhere from 4-10.

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TotoyBato says:

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Unless the other great boxers grow some HEAVY HANDS and KO power, they will all succumb to the pressure from GGG. Curtis Stephens had KO power and came prepared. GGG's movement allows him to cut-off, corner and deliver accurate punishing blows to body and head. GGG displayed a great chin required from a pressure fighter. His constant and punishing offense keeps the opponent busy on the defense. This guy can get in range and deliver a high volume of heavy punches. He has great stamina and can easily outwork any boxer. Right now GGG can beat Mayweather, Martinez and Ward. If Pacquiao and GGG were same size it would make a great fight. GGG can beat the current Pacquiao but not the prime Pacquiao. Right now GGG is the best fighter P4P. I just can't see the other great boxers on the P4P list at this time winning against him if they all were the same size.

amayseng says:

[QUOTE=TotoyBato;39612]Unless the other great boxers grow some HEAVY HANDS and KO power, they will all succumb to the pressure from GGG. Curtis Stephens had KO power and came prepared. GGG's movement allows him to cut-off, corner and deliver accurate punishing blows to body and head. GGG displayed a great chin required from a pressure fighter. His constant and punishing offense keeps the opponent busy on the defense. This guy can get in range and deliver a high volume of heavy punches. He has great stamina and can easily outwork any boxer. Right now GGG can beat Mayweather, Martinez and Ward. If Pacquiao and GGG were same size it would make a great fight. GGG can beat the current Pacquiao but not the prime Pacquiao. Right now GGG is the best fighter P4P. I just can't see the other great boxers on the P4P list at this time winning against him if they all were the same size.[/QUOTE]

this is a good post, great points about ggg's chin and fantastic endurance...

this is why i think he beats floyd if ggg can make 154 healthy...

floyd wont out work him and floyd wont hurt him. ggg could beat floyd a couple different ways.

i think ward would be his toughest challenge though.

stevens has some power and landed clean shots on ggg who just took them like nothing.

ggg is skilled, talented and smart. he has great boxing iq.

stormcentre says:

Another well written article by Hauser. Lots of nice catchy, elegant but not overly laden with superlatives; phrases in there too.

Carmine Cas says:

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I would pick Ward over GGG right now at 168

Mayweather, it depends on the weight honestly

Sergio Martinez would lose if his physical health doesn't take a significant turn for the better.

GGG would decapitate a current or prime pacquiao, manny's resume doesn't indicate he would be a fighter of Golovkin's pedigree. And GGG's footwork is too good

Radam G says:

Hehehehe! First! Three g would have never fought a "prime pacquiao!" Secondly, Da Manny footwork is much better than 3 g. Of course an Asian-hating muthasucka not knowing syet 'bout boxing won't and can't see that.

Three-g dude doesn't use much foot work or has had to. Lastly, it cracks me UP of the ____ ____ that exists in cyberspace.

Having a mop-and-broom life will keep him ____ ____! Hahaha! Al-hamdulilahi! Dimwitted terrorism in cyberspace doesn't leave a body count, Wallahi! So we are all the safer for ____ ____ staying in our Universe __ing juvenile Pac hating and posting bullsyet about Asians because we are running syet and making BIG moolah that he desires. But he won't ever find the key.

Hulkquez won the fight of his life with a lotto punch. But the _____ will never win a BIG money lotto with his hard-earned poverty-wage dollars.

The Roast said that it was too peaceful around here. Hehehe! Holla!

The Shadow says:

LOL RG, come on, man! That was unprovoked! I think we should settle this once and for all with a game of Fight Night on the Xbox 360.

Carmine Cas says:

Lol wow I even apologized for my comments in the past on the other article. What I said on this article does not make me racist, I think you are the one whose hating. Post fighting life has

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gotten you bored and crazy causing you to constantly criticize everyone on here when you disagree with an opinion, just mad cuz you're not man enough to wear the pink fedora smh. Marquez arguably beat Pacquiao 3x before he put him to sleep, you b*tch and cry more then he does lmao. You are OBSESSED with MARQUEZ. He probably haunts you in his dreams, let it go