

## Sergey Kovalev Nominated as New "Baddest Man on the Planet"

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Tuesday, 10 December 2013 00:00

---



ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. – Evil Empire? What Evil Empire?

Not only are the Russians coming, they're already here. This might come as a surprise to those who remember then-President Ronald Reagan's description of the "Red Menace" that Americans had to be prepared to combat, but the Russkies are increasingly popular in the United States and Canada ... just about everywhere, in fact, where fight fans attach higher importance to a boxer's excitement quotient than his originating country.

WBO light heavyweight champion Sergey "Krusher" Kovalev (23-0-1, 21 KOs) met with the media here Saturday afternoon, a few hours before the HBO-televized tripleheader headlined by a title defense by WBA/WBO super bantamweight champion Guillermo Rigondeaux against Joseph Agbeko, and he stood as living proof that, well, the Cold War – at least in the ring – has thawed considerably.

## Sergey Kovalev Nominated as New "Baddest Man on the Planet"

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Tuesday, 10 December 2013 00:00

---

A little more than a year ago, the now-30-year-old Kovalev was a free agent whose manager, Egis Klimas, was pitching his guy to any American promoter who would listen. Most of them said thanks, but no thanks.

And now? Kovalev, if not the very hottest property in the fight game, is raising his personal heat index with each spectacular knockout. On Nov. 30, he needed less than a minute into round two to bomb out challenger Ismayl Sillakh in *Le Colisee de Quebec* in Quebec City. The other 175-pound titlist fighting that night, WBC champ Adonis "Superman" Stevenson (23-1, 20 KOs), didn't work quite that quickly, taking Tony Bellew into the sixth round before taking out the Englishman.

Amazing, isn't it, that the fight everyone now wants to see is something hardly anyone knew they would want to see 17 months ago, when Kovalev was a virtual unknown, at least on this side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Clearly, power-punching guys are easy sells. If there is anything that seems absolutely certain, it is that a slugfest between Kovalev and Stevenson, if and when it occurs, will not go the distance.

Until that happens, we will have to settle for the standard war of words. Stevenson has said his preference is that his next opponent be nearly-49-year-old Bernard Hopkins (54-6-2, 32 KOs), the IBF light heavyweight champ, or England's Carl Froch (32-2, 23 KOs), who would be moving up from super middleweight.

"They don't seem too interested (in fighting Kovalev just yet)," Main Events president Kathy Duva, Kovalev's American promoter, said of her inquiries to Stevenson's promoter, Yvon Michel. "I spoke to Yvon a couple of days before the fights in Quebec. But once Sergey's fight was over, I tried to speak to him again and I couldn't get him to talk to me. I kind of took that as a sign that he has other plans for Stevenson."

Klimas said he thinks he knows the reason why Team Stevenson is looking elsewhere.

## Sergey Kovalev Nominated as New "Baddest Man on the Planet"

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Tuesday, 10 December 2013 00:00

---

"For Stevenson, we are changing Sergey's nickname. He's not going to be 'Krusher' Kovalev. He is going to be 'Kryptonite' Kovalev. Kryptonite brings down Superman, yes?"

Entering the last few weeks of 2013, both Kovalev – a resident of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., by way of his native Chelyabinsk, Russia -- and Stevenson, a native of Port-au-Prince, Haiti, who now calls Longueuil, Quebec, home, are strong candidates for Fighter of the Year. Each has been exceptionally busy for world-class fighters, logging four bouts apiece, totaling eight KOs between them.

"It's not just that Sergey wins; it's the way he wins," Duva said of the new lead pony in her promotional stable. "It's just so compelling. You can't look away. And Stevenson is like that, too.

"Everybody wants to see that fight. I can't believe that if you saw the two of them fight separately last week, you wouldn't want to see them fight each other. But who knows when it will happen, or even if it will happen. That fight might be worth more later, I don't know. My fear is that we have captured lightning in a bottle and if we don't make that fight soon, it might not ever happen."

To understand just how far and how fast Kovalev has come, you have to go back at least to June 2012 or, if you really want to be precise, to late 1989, when the first wave of fighters from the old Soviet Union came to America to the kind of hostility generally reserved for hated enemies of Our Way of Life.

A California-based promoter, Lou Falcigno, brought over the first wave of Russian fighters – lightweight Sergei Artemiev, middleweight Viktor Egorov and heavyweight Yuri Vaulin -- to the U.S. in December 1989. Their ring appearances in this country were greeted with chants of "USA! USA!" and undisguised animosity.

Vaulin (as a cruiserweight) and Artemiev, who was forced to retire after suffering a brain bleed in his final fight against Carl Griffith, each fought and lost in bids for USBA championships, but they never came close to making the sort of impact here and around the world that Kovalev, junior welterweight Ruslan Provodnikov (Siberia) and middleweight Gennady Golovkin (Kazakhstan) are making now.

## Sergey Kovalev Nominated as New "Baddest Man on the Planet"

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Tuesday, 10 December 2013 00:00

---

"Five years ago, when we started with Tomasz Adamek (of Poland), we were told that an Eastern European could never be successful in America," Duva said. "That's one of the reasons you never saw anyone from that part of the world fight on HBO, or hardly ever. If one of those guys did fight here, it was as the opponent. They weren't the one being built up.

"Now the perception has changed dramatically. It's not about your ethnicity; it's about how much excitement you generate. If you're exciting – and Sergey is definitely exciting – none of that other stuff matters. We live in a different world now."

Kovalev, for sure, didn't get any big build-up. He was being offered around by Klimas, whose entreaties were mostly met with disinterest.

"Egis had literally brought Sergey to every promoter in the United States and been turned down," Duva recalled. "He met with us one day and said, 'I have this light heavyweight. All I ask you is to put him in a fight, with anybody you want. If you don't like when it's done, we won't bother you again.'"

Duva figured, what the hell. She put Kovalev in against an opponent, Darnell Boone, he'd struggled with nearly two years earlier in winning an eight-round split decision. This time, Kovalev destroyed Boone in two rounds.

"We don't often see Russell (veteran promoter J Russell Peltz, who serves as matchmaker for NBC SportsNet's fight series) get excited, but he came tearing across the arena, ran up to me and said, 'Who is that guy? He's amazing!'"

With each emphatic knockout registered by Kovalev, Provodnikov and Golovkin, another brick gets chipped out of what remains of the wall that once separated these United States from the erstwhile Evil Empire.

"Sergey appeals to everybody," Duva said. "He transcends nationality. He's so warm, so

## Sergey Kovalev Nominated as New "Baddest Man on the Planet"

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Tuesday, 10 December 2013 00:00

---

approachable. He's not anything like Ivan Drago (the remorseless Soviet heavyweight portrayed by Dolph Lundgren in 1985's *Rocky IV*). Until the bell rings, that is. Then he *becomes* Drago."

We now open our arms to the Dragos, just as we opened them to homegrown fighters and those from other countries that bring some needed buzz to a sport that cherishes punching power regardless of what flag the big hitter is flying.

"At the postfight press conference after one of his fights, a reporter asked a question about what Sergey had said to the guy after he knocked him down. He said, 'What did you want him to do at that point? Did you want (the referee to step in and end) the fight? Sergey said, 'No, I wanted him to get up so I could hit him again.'

"Roberto Duran was like that. Mike Tyson was like that. There are few guys who you could call the baddest man on the planet. I can't think of anyone since Tyson that you could give that moniker to, but Sergey just might be that guy."

[WATCH RELATED VIDEOS ON BOXINGCHANNEL.TV](#)

[Comment on this article](#)

### **brownsugar says:**

I have no problem with the label KOVALEV is a true killer... Don't see any body near his weight beating him. The naysayers will have vanished in 1 years time.

### **SouthPaul says:**

I'm a doubter. I ain't seeing him as the boxing boogymen just yet. I'd also take Stevenson. I think he'd get his target quicker and possibly put Kovalev's lights out.

A random thought: Max Kellerman needs to shorten up his lengthy questions specifically when he's conducting an interview with a fighter whose English isn't so good. He done it a variety of times with Kovalev. Aggravating!

### **amayseng says:**

## Sergey Kovalev Nominated as New "Baddest Man on the Planet"

Written by Bernard Fernandez  
Tuesday, 10 December 2013 00:00

---

Good for Kovalev, a year ago no one had an interest in him, today he is a straight killer in that ring.

Kovalev's most important asset may be his timing. It is quite well.

I would take Kovalev against Adonis, only because Adonis' attacks in linear paths, his footwork gets jacked up

and he doesn't possess a great right hand, or a good right hook. If Adonis improves that jab and right hook

he will be even more difficult to deal with.

I hope these guys get two more fights under their belts and meet up by next year this time. Let the

intrigue continue to build.

### **amayseng says:**

[QUOTE=SouthPaul;41068]I'm a doubter. I ain't seeing him as the boxing boogymen just yet. I'd also take Stevenson. I think he'd get his target quicker and possibly put Kovalev's lights out.

A random thought:[B] Max Kellerman needs to shorten up his lengthy questions specifically when he's conducting an interview with a fighter whose English isn't so good. He done it a variety of times with Kovalev. Aggravating![/QUOTE][B]

Agreed, I like Kellerman but it is as if he just talks to hear himself talk...

### **brownsugar says:**

Kellerman has to get his agenda programming out in every sentence... Doctrinization is key with Max.

### **amayseng says:**

Having said all that I wouldn't be surprised if either Kovalev or Adonis win. These two guys are exciting and great for the sport. I also like, being 35 now, that they aren't 20...ha

Makes me feel better.

I agree BRownsug, it is like Max always has to add something of verbal value as if Merchant is always in the back of his mind.