

In Cedric Agnew, Sergey Kovalev Faces the Unknown

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Tuesday, 25 March 2014 09:08



“I know nothing about him,” admitted Sergey Kovalev in regards to his next opponent, Cedric Agnew.

No matter. Kovalev said he didn’t usually get bogged down in watching videos of his opponents anyways. He said his trainer, John David Jackson, was the one who prepared the gameplan for his fights. His job was just to train hard and be ready for fight night.

“I feel good,” said Kovalev.

But Kovalev said he couldn’t find video on Cedric Agnew on YouTube, meaning he had at least tried to have a look at the undefeated light heavyweight prospect he’ll face this Saturday night in Atlantic City.

Agnew’s promoter, Malcolm Garrett, said he’s glad his guy is veiled in such mystery. It’s not exactly by design though, at least not up until this point. Garrett said he’s tried for over a year now to get Agnew a fight on television. He said he felt like he was given the runaround by ESPN multiple times and sounded frustrated about the whole process, even on the precipice of revealing his fighter to the world in a main event attraction on HBO.

Garrett said he hopes Kovalev is looking past Agnew a bit. He said much of the talk he’s heard

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from Kovalev as of late has been about a potential showdown with lineal champion Adonis Stevenson. He said he hopes Kovalev is thinking about Stevenson and not Agnew.

“Maybe that’s better for us,” said Garrett.

When I visited Agnew in camp last week at Main Street Boxing Gym in Houston, trainer Bobby Benton came over and asked me not to show too much of his fighter on the video I was capturing for Boxing Channel.

Mystery seems to be a big part of the plan, and when we chatted after the workout, Benton sounded as frustrated as Garrett with the business of boxing. Mystery is important right now, but that hasn’t always been the plan. These guys want their fighter to get his due.

“Fights fell through,” said Benton. “We took several fights ... every one offered to us. They just didn’t happen.”

Benton said Agnew asked for Kovalev. He said the kid is an underrated fighter who just needs a chance to shine on the big stage. He and his fighter are confident they can shock the world.

“He’s a world champion,” Benton said of Kovalev. “That’s where we want to be.”

There were two people there to visit Agnew’s camp. One being me, and the other was Fighthype’s Lamont Joseph.

Agnew avoided eye contact with us for the most part. He was aware we were there but didn’t seem sure how to act in front of us. He hit the bag, worked the mitts with Benton and trotted around the ring up on his toes. He appeared to be in good shape, a product of being a “gym rat” as Benton put it.

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But when we finally talked, Agnew displayed a quiet confidence about him. He genuinely believes he'll defeat Kovalev on Saturday. That's not always the case. You can always tell when a fighter believes he's been chosen a sacrificial lamb. Agnew might have been, but he doesn't believe it.

Agnew's nickname is L.O.W. He said the acronym stands for Leader of War. He'll need that kind of attitude against a rumbler like Kovalev.

"I'm very excited," said Agnew. "I feel like this has been a long time coming. We've been waiting for this chance [for what] feels like forever."

I asked Agnew to tell me how he sizes Kovalev up.

"I look at him as a very strong fighter [with a] good punch. You attack that type of fighter with your brain ... the smarter fighter wins."

During a teleconference call earlier this month, Agnew called Kovalev ordinary. I asked him to clarify the comment. Is this knockout machine really just ordinary?

"Let me clarify 'ordinary' for you guys ... we've had the Ray Leonard and the Roy Jones [types] ... I don't look at Roy Jones in his prime as an ordinary fighter because he had everything: speed, power and movement—everything. All Sergey [has] shown throughout his fights is just power, and you can beat a guy with power ... you just got to use your brain in there."

Agnew wouldn't give any prediction for the bout other than this: "Winning."

I asked Benton what kind of training they'd been doing over the past few weeks. How will they attack a fighter with such good power and technical skill? Will they try to box him from the outside? Or will they surprise everyone by taking it right to Kovalev?

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“You’ll have to see,” said Benton with a sly smile.

Kovalev is probably better than just ordinary. He has tremendous power and was one of the top amateur boxers in Russia before he turned pro. He’s really hit his stride over the past year or so, and he’s on the cusp of becoming one of the biggest stars in the sport.

For his part, Kovalev said he’s fine being in the dark on Agnew. He said training has gone exactly as planned, and his weight was right where he wanted it to be leading up to the fight.

“Everything is going well,” said Kovalev. “Like usual.”

Still, it’s a big moment for him. I asked Kovalev what it was like to finally be headlining a show on HBO. It doesn’t get much bigger in our sport, and this could be the start of something really big for him.

“For me, every fight on HBO is big ... I’m happy. This time, I have the main event of the evening. It’s the most responsibility ... It’s my show.”

Still, Kovalev said he wasn’t feeling any additional pressure, and seemed to be telling the truth. Kovalev seemed just as pleasant and calm as when I visited him a few weeks ago in San Antonio. Ordinary or not, he’s a man well adjusted to his place and time.

“No pressure. It’s the same, just more motivation, more responsibility.”

Kovalev will seek to prove to Agnew that he’s the real deal. Agnew will hope to show the world he’s as good or better than Kovalev, the WBO light heavyweight titleholder and one of the best fighters in the sport.

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Sergey "Krusher" Kovalev (23-0-1, 21KOs) faces Cedric "L.O.W" Agnew (26-0-0, 13 KOs) March 29 at the Ballroom at Boardwalk Hall in Atlantic, City, NJ. The broadcast begins live on HBO Boxing After Dark at 10:00 PM ET. Junior welterweights Thomas Dulorme and Karim Mayfield kick things off as the co-feature.

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The Commish says:

Sergey Kovalev was on SiriusXM's "Monday Night at the Fights" last night me me & Gerry Cooney. It was a challenging interview for all of us, as Kovalev speaks little English & Gerry & I combined don't know two words of Russian. Yet, we somehow made the interview work. The champ came across well and, according to Ellen Haley of Main Events, enjoyed himself.

We found it astounding that Kovalev told us he knows next to nothing about the man he will face on Saturday, unbeaten Cedric Agnew. What Kovalev did tell us is " I have worked very hard for this. I am in very good shape. I come out and do what I do best--fight!"

That's all he has to do.

I wonder if Agnew is feeling the way Mike Tyson's early opponents used to feel--numb. They would say the same things as Agnew is saying ("He's only human"... "He can be hurt"... "Nobody is invincible"... "I don't just have to deal with him. He has to deal with me!"... "I am coming to win the belt, not just say I fought for it."), then they'd get into their dressing room and pukes their guts out. Then, like a prisoner on Death Row, they'd walk out to their execution and be dispatched in quick, destructive fashion.

Agnew is closing in on his final meal.

-Randy G.

TingsSproledo says:

Kovalev seems the type who doesn't care who he faces. He just wants to get them in the ring and see what's what. We need more of that in the sport.

Skibbz says:

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I agree Springs, there are a few in every division with that mentality. I think a lot of them are guys who had to fight to get their foot in the door, mostly coming from outside of the US. That being said many US fighters take that stance too..

TingsSproledo says:

Tings.

I'm not Springs Toledo, though I will channel is goodness to be an awesome forum poster.

Radam G says:

Hehehehe! The Commish, that was cold! BTW! Does anybody know what is up with the last meal deal? Do they also get a last restroom call?

I'd delay my execution because I'd need a last poop and pee. Haha! And then I'd want another last meal.

Man, I cannot dig how it is cool to execute any muthasucka with his bowels ready to pop.

Wow, MAN, I'd gas up the place on my execution. I couldn't go out with flatulence all up in me.

Danggit! I'm not trying roll up in Heaven to meet Jesus and Da Big Poppa G, and then fart.

But if I go to helldom, it's AIGHT! I'm gonna kick satan's arse anyway and take his pitchfork, stick him in the hot arse with it. And pi\$\$ out his fire. I hope that muthajoker gets a bad fever and catches pneumonia. Holla!