

Heavyweight Upheavel

Written by Steve Kim
Monday, 29 November 1999 19:00

So how long does it take to resurrect a heavyweight career? I guess thirty seconds, judging by the way David Tua blew out Michael Moorer this past weekend.

Remember, it was only a year ago that Tua was getting out-boxed by the crafty Chris Byrd and seemingly headed into an abyss.

Well, after consecutive victories over Fres Oquendo- in a fight he was well behind in, until landing a big shot in round nine- and his early KO of Moorer, Tua is all of sudden a big-time player again.

It's been said a million times in this game that being a heavyweight, you're only one punch away from pugilistic prominence.

The heavyweight division is always in a state of flux for several reasons. Number one, because there really isn't a truly dominant big man.

You say Lennox Lewis.

I say remember Hasim Rahman in South Africa last year?

And secondly, because while some might say there a lot of parity in that class. Parity, sometimes means, mediocrity, that's spread out. And that's currently what the heavyweight division is. It just one mans opinion, but here's a list of the top 10 heavyweight's in the game.

1- Lennox Lewis: Coming off his destruction of Mike Tyson he reaffirms his status as the games best heavyweight. But what does it say then about the state of this division when a victory over a very worn fighter, who hadn't had a quality win in over a decade, is given this much credence? But say this for the big Brit, when focused and in shape, he has been very formidable. When he isn't, that's when occurrences like Oliver McCall and Rahman happen. Lewis is still the games best big man but he isn't at his physical prime and who knows how interested he really is anymore about the game. But till someone knocks him off, he's top dog.

2- Wladimir Klitschko: There are still a lot of unknowns about this big Ukrainian, but a lot is being made of his win over Ray Mercer. He's being touted as the second coming and HBO's new heavyweight hope- this after the implosions of Michael Grant and Tua. But don't forget, this is the same guy who lost against journeyman Ross Puritty and Mercer was a 41-year old fighter who was prone to inactivity and hadn't had a quality win since 1996.

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Also, despite seemingly throwing only about 5 hard right hands, he sure marked up Klitschko didn't he? I just want to see him handle some live fire coming back his way and some adversity before I christen him the real thing. But, the physical tools are there.

3- Chris Byrd: Yeah, he may be a stinker and he may always be a bit too small to really make an impact, but you know what? He's already made an impact by downing the likes of Vitaly Klitschko and Tua with his unusual style. And looking at his losses against Wlad Klitschko and Ike Ibeabuchi, only the very best have caged this Byrd. Is he exciting? No. But he's definitely effective and he's exactly the non-threatening type of guy that could get Lewis into a state of complacency.

Currently, he is the top rated contender in the IBF for Lewis' title. This is boxing's version of David vs. Goliath. And you never know, Byrd just may have a slingshot up his wing.

4- John Ruiz: Ok, ok, some of you will kill me for listing this guy so high. But at the end of the day, he wins- or at least manages to hold on to his title. But give 'the Quiet Man' this, he is an over-achiever that gets everything out of his natural talent and he makes for tough, grinding fights. And you can't tell me that anyone that survived 36 rounds against Evander Holyfield isn't a tough and seasoned prizefighter. Now there is talk of him facing Tyson and many think it's an easy way for 'Rusty Mike' to regain a belt. Sorry, but Ruiz has a good jab and sharp right that would leave Tyson on the outside and ineffective. He'll never be a fan favorite but somehow, he gets the job done.

5- David Tua: We discussed him up top, and it's pretty simple, any heavyweight that has his chin and left hook will always have a place in the sport. You just have to keep him away from classy boxers that can keep him at bay with the jab and stay away from his hook. But even then, as Oquendo learned, you have to fight a perfect fight to down this guy. Yeah, Tua is one-dimensional in many respects, but he has the right one for this division because it's not like there are a bunch of 230-pound Willie Peps out there right now.

6- Evander Holyfield: Wasn't he supposed to be a dead man a few years ago. Forget about his resurgent performance against Rahman, it's arguable that he may have edged Lewis in their rematch, and that if not for a bad call by Joe Cortez in the Ruiz rematch and some dubious judging in their rubber match, Holyfield is actually on a lengthy winning streak. 'The Real Deal' is a pure fighter who's as crafty as they come. He'll throw everything he has at you- and the kitchen sink, just as Rahman. He may not have the youth anymore, but he's a tough old goat that flat out can't be intimidated and is an all-time tough guy. Until somebody really beats him up, he ain't going nowhere.

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7- Jameel McCline: Alright, alright, I realize that his three consecutive wins over Michael Grant, Lance Whitaker and Shannon Briggs may have been 20 feet worth of second tier wins, it shows that 'Big Time' has made some quantum leaps for a guy that only began boxing a few years ago coming out of prison and had one solitary amateur fight. McCline, is an intelligent sort that realizes that he is still very green and has a lot to learn. But he does have the size 6'6, 245 pounds, and good athletic ability and a willingness to learn. And in today's market, that's good enough to go places. There's talk of him facing the likes of Klitschko but that talk is premature, McCline still needs at least another year or two of growth before he really hit's 'the Big Time.' But he's worth keeping an eye on.

8- Vitaly Klitschko: So is he Tommie Aaron to Wlad's, Henry? No, not really since the talent disparity isn't that great but most observers feel that it's Wladimir, that is the more gifted of the two brothers. Not that Vitaly doesn't have the tools but he still has to overcome the 'Quitally' tag put on him after he quit on his stool against Byrd back in 2000 in a fight that he was well ahead in. He said he had a bum shoulder, others say he had a faulty ticker. Only time will tell, which is correct.

9- Hasim Rahman: So is he 'Has-been' Rahman as Lewis labeled him after their rematch last year or the new millennium Buster Douglas? We'll see, but 'the Rock' is still a serviceable heavyweight that has name value, a win over Lewis in his back pocket and an exciting style that has put him in several entertaining bouts. Rahman, if you recall was defeating Tua thoroughly in late 98 until a bad call caused his stoppage in the late rounds. He also has a win over Corrie Sanders in addition to his huge upset of Lewis. He probably gets one more chance when it's all said and done and either his punching power gets him back on top or his shaky chin ends his career.

10- Kirk Johnson: Johnson is here by default because nothing he did against Ruiz this past July indicates he should be here but like I said earlier, the heavyweight division is about as shallow as a kiddie pool. Johnson is one of those fighters that has all the physical tools and skills. You won't see many guys his size that can move on their feet, or box, or work off the jab like he can. But the flip side is, many question his work ethic and his toughness. For all his God-given tools, remember he went life-and-death twice with a blown-up Al Cole, was extremely cautious against Larry Donald(the King of Caution) and was getting beat by Ruiz before being DQ'd. The problem with Johnson seems to be that the sum of his parts aren't greater than the whole.

WHAT ABOUT MIKE?

Yeah, you read that right, no Mike Tyson. When are people going to finally

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realize that Tyson is a spent
finally convince even his biggest fans.

bullet? I guess a loss to Ruiz would