

Steve Bunce

Chisora takes risk with slap in the face



We will find out tonight whether Dereck Chisora's slap around the chops of Vitali Klitschko was a wise move or stupid one when the pair meet here for the WBC heavyweight title.

It was some blow and Chisora's camp were as shocked as Klitschko when it happened and are seriously not happy.

Chisora said: "It was not planned. It was just something that happened and I did it because they [the Klitschko brothers] have messed me around for two years." Twice in the past this fight has been called off due to Klitschko's late withdrawals. Chisora's trainer, Don Charles, was still stunned two hours after the incident and said: "I'm very worried. I'm disturbed. That was not meant to happen. This is a sport and that was not good."

Klitschko deserves more respect. There was a point in his career, before Lennox Lewis altered his cheekbones and eye socket and drained him of several pints of blood, when nobody took him seriously. Chisora owns a Smart car and a London taxi and has fought just 17 times; he is still waiting to be taken seriously and that slap won't have helped.

In 2003 Klitschko was ruled out of his fight with Lewis and in the melee that followed Klitschko was trying to throw a few illegal punches. "His face was a mess, his people said he couldn't continue, but he wanted to fight," remembered Lewis. "His wife still asks me to give him a rematch. She has told me that he talks about it every day. He is an old-fashioned fighter, a proper fighter."

The fight made Klitschko a respectable heavyweight and he is unbeaten since that night in 11 fights, including 10 for the WBC belt, and he possibly has not lost a single round; he has certainly not been under pressure by any of the men who have stood to attention in the opposite corner.

It has to be said that some of the sacrifices have shaken in fear, knowing that a savage mauling was coming their way. They have left the ring for their uncertain boxing futures, some via a local hospital for a check before flights home, not understanding why they took up the sport in the first place. It is doubtful if any of Klitschko's victims since the night he lost to Lewis have left the ring with their reputations enhanced, which is a sad reflection on the realistic desires of trash-talking modern fighters and the slim pickings in the desperate ratings where promoters conceal their contenders. It is into this extreme world that Chisora now finds himself as the latest on a bloody conveyor belt of men who will never be remembered or missed.

Chisora has arguably the worst record of any fighter to share a ring with Klitschko since somebody called Ismael Youla fell over in two easy rounds in 1999. Chisora has lost twice in 17 fights, has performed like he was bored on more than one occasion, has lost out at the scales, been banned for a bite and admitted to being hurt in other fights. He is honest, open, raw, fearless and, when he starts swinging, reminiscent of the group of tragically neglected American world heavyweight champions from the 1980s. The group were dubbed the Lost Generation because of their love of the crack pipe, prostitutes and bling. "They self-destructed but they could really fight and Dereck reminds me of them," said Adam Booth, who trains David Haye.

Chisora insists: "I needed a fight like this to get me up, to get me motivated. I can just go out and fight and that is what I want to do. Klitschko doesn't like to fight – he likes to bully." Chisora has been trying to get in Klitschko's face and the slap was just the latest in pre-fight tests as part of a ploy to make Klitschko fight with emotion.

Last December, Chisora fought the unbeaten Robert Helenius in front of a capacity crowd in Helsinki. It was supposed to be an easy fight for Helenius before he stepped in with Klitschko. However, it was a slugfest, a throwback heavyweight fight contested over the centre of the ring and when it finished Chisora looked like a clear winner. A split decision went to Helenius, but his body suffered and he has retreated from the sport and left an opening for Chisora.

Tonight Chisora will need some luck from a variety of sources if he is to pull off one of the biggest shocks involving a British fighter in a world championship contest. He needs Klitschko to have taken him lightly, which is just possible following his admission that 90 per cent of his time is devoted to politics in his native Ukraine. He needs Klitschko's joints to cause him trouble and limit his movement. This is also possible because Klitschko took a four-year sabbatical from the ring in 2004 and in his last fight he suddenly just crumpled to the canvas when it looked like his knee collapsed. It is possible that the slap means that Klitschko will now make the fight personal and that could seriously backfire on Chisora.

Klitschko has stopped only one person quickly in his last 10 world title fights and that was because of a leg injury in round one. He actually hovered above the fallen victim, swearing, frothing at the mouth and telling him to get up. He likes to make sure before the end and has slowly ruined three men in the eighth round, one in the ninth, three in the 10th, one in the 12th and one on points. He needs to know there is no resistance before letting his big arms fly.

Chisora is in the spotlight and, unlike most of the carefully selected boxers that fight Klitschko, he is less predictable, less well known. There is no "revert to type" model with Chisora. He might freeze, he might fall over, he might run scared; the truth is that nobody really knows.

"I don't have a plan. I'm just going to fight," said Chisora. He is probably telling the truth and that will make every second of the fight a lot of fun.

Heavyweight Upsets

James Douglas bt Mike Tyson

Iron Mike was undisputed world champion going into the bout with 42-1 shot Douglas in Tokyo in 1990. But "Buster" – just three weeks after his mother's death – overturned the odds with a 10th-round knockout.

Hasim Rehman bt Lennox Lewis

The Canadian Brit opted to film a movie role as part of his training for the 2001 fight but paid the price in South Africa, going down to a fourth-round knockout. Lewis won a rematch seven months later.

Leon Spinks bt Muhammad Ali

By then one of the great names in sport, even at 36 years of age Ali was expected to win this 1978 fight with ease, but was outpointed over 15 rounds in Las Vegas by a 24-year-old tyro from Missouri.

Sarah Cobb