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Jones, Tszyu Outshine Lebedev-Cox Fight at Crocus

By Alec Luhn

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Lebedev, seen holding his title belt, is favorite for the WBA bantamweight fight. His trainer Tszyu is on his right.

You could be forgiven for thinking that Wednesday's boxing match at Crocus City Hall will be between ex-world champions Roy Jones, Jr. and Kostya Tszyu. The two legendary boxers are listed first on the fight bill, and their faces grace the event posters all over town.

In reality, the actual fight will be between Russian boxer Denis "The White Swan" Lebedev, 32, and Barbadian fighter Shawn "The Sniper" Cox, 37, who are listed second on the bill. Lebedev will defend the WBA interim cruiserweight title that he won during his November fight against American James "Lights Out" Toney.

Dubbed "The Ring of Stars" by organizers, the actual fight has been pushed to the background by the antics of celebrity guests such as Jones who flew in to a pre-fight event Saturday in a helicopter. Fans competed against each other in a push-up contest for autographs from Jones,

who Lebedev beat last year, Tszyu and disgraced British former heavyweight champion Dereck Chisora, who organizers said was an "honored guest" for the fight.

Chisora lost his boxing license earlier this year after his aggressive antics before and after his loss to Vitali Klitschko in Munich, where he slapped Klitschko at the weigh-in, spat water in the face of Klitschko's brother Wladimir during the introductions and brawled with fellow British heavyweight David Haye at a post-fight news conference.

Lebedev's challenger, Cox, seemed a bit starstruck after the official pre-fight news conference Monday, which took place in front of a backdrop featuring the glowering visages of Tszyu and Jones.

"I've never been involved in something like this. ... You got two of the greats and the king of the mic," Cox said, referring to Jones, Tszyu and event announcer Michael Buffer, famous for his trademark phrase "Let's get ready to rumble" who will do the duties during the fight. "It's a great honor, but I'm trying just to focus on the fight. I'm not leaving here without that belt."

Although Cox is a relatively unknown boxer who is not ranked in the top 15, he's coming off a big win against former WBC champion Wayne "Big Truck" Braithwaite, whom he knocked out in the first round.

Tszyu, who is Lebedev's trainer, admitted that Cox will be harder to beat than Toney, but said Lebedev will topple the inexperienced Cox.

"He's never fought against good fighters, except the last one," he said.

Jones praised Lebedev's power, declining to name a weakness as he said he may end up fighting him again for a title down the road.

"He's very durable and he's got very good punching power," Jones said. "I like his style."

Both Jones and Chisora said Lebedev would most likely win the fight and as of Monday, Lebedev was a heavy favorite on several online betting sites.

If Lebedev wins this fight, he will likely face Panamanian boxer Guillermo Jones, who holds the regular WBA cruiserweight title, Tszyu said. He may try for other titles, if Tszyu has anything to say about it.

"I recognize only three titles: IBF, WBO and WBC," Tszyu said.

Lebedev has been castigated in the Western press for holding most of his fights in Russia, but announcer Buffer said he doesn't necessarily need to go abroad to attract a big name.

"Not many fighters today can sell out Madison Square Garden, and Lebedev can't. But he can sell out a big place here in Moscow," he added.

Lebedev said he would go abroad to fight as long as the fight was "clean." He said he turned down an offer from promoter Don King to fight Guillermo Jones in Panama due to doubts over the fairness in all aspects of the fight.

Lebedev lost his last fight abroad, against Marco Huck in Germany.

"If you give me a guarantee that everything will be fair, we will go," he said.

"Ring of Stars" is Wednesday. 8 p.m.

Crocus City Hall, 65-66 kilometer on the MKAD. Metro Myakinino. Tel. 550-0055. www.crocus-hall.ru. Live on Rossia-2 channel.

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