You gotta hand it to Don King. Like Old Man River, he just keeps rolling along. Month after month, year after year, decade after decade he delivers the goods, such as those goods are, in spite of a dwindling talent pool, in spite of everything. Much of what ails boxing can be laid at Don King's feet, but the scarcity of big boys who can box is not one of them.

Men have been saying forever that whoever controls the heavyweight division controls boxing. Don King heard that long ago and took those words to heart. From the moment he first hit boxing in the early 1970s, King thought big, dreamed big, and signed big. Everybody from Ali, Frazier and Foreman to Rahman, Ruiz and Holyfield has fought for Don King. It wasn't always pretty, but it was always profitable.

King's latest installment of the heavyweight championship boxing spectacle came to Madison Square Garden in New York City last Saturday. Called Rendezvous with Destiny: Battle for Supremacy, it might as well have been called Rendezvous with Redundancy: Battle for Mendacity. King assembled some of the best heavyweights on the planet, and some certifiable retreads, for a series of four twelve-round bouts, two of which were for titles.

The festivities got underway with Evander "Real Deal" Holyfield (38-8-2 25 KOs) vs. Larry "The Legend" Donald (42-3-2 24 KOs) in a non-title bout. Holyfield needs no introduction. He is the former four-time world heavyweight champion, a future hall of famer, one of the all-time greats. Holyfield is boxing's ultimate overachiever, whereas Donald is boxing's ultimate underachiever, so there was some poetic justice in making this fight. It more or less looked okay on paper. On canvas it was another story.

Expectations were low going into the bout and the fight lived down to expectations. Larry Donald was Larry Donald, a fine boxer devoid of killer instinct, and Holyfield was less than a shadow of his former self. Donald came into the fight with a game plan and, kudos to his trainer Colin Morgan, he executed it with precision. But Holyfield is too far gone these days to compete at the highest level, to compete at the level of a refurbished Larry Donald.

Watching Holyfield fight these days is less about boxing than it is about vanity and denial. Holyfield is now losing to top-20 fighters. Top-30 and top-40 fighters might be next. The acute boxer's intelligence that served him so well in the ring for so many years has been kayoed by his body's refusal to perform. Holyfield has been mugged by many men in many fights and he has been pounded by the passage of time, but Evander always fought back. Those days, however, are no more.

On Saturday night Holyfield ate jabs like he was a starving man dying of hunger. There's no spring left in his legs, no lateral movement, he can barely bob and weave. And his arsenal - the great jab and textbook left hook - is gone for good. All that remains is Holyfield's stubborn southern toughness and unvanquished warrior soul. The judges gave it to Larry Donald after twelve. Holyfield didn't win a round.

The second big bout of the night featured Hasim “The Rock” Rahman (40-5-1 3 KOs) against Kali “Checkmate” Meehan (29-3 23 KOs). Rahman is the former heavyweight champ who kayoed Lennox Lewis with one punch in 2001 to win the title. That was a glorious night for Rahman. His second glorious night was at the Garden on Saturday, where he demolished Kali Meehan.

Meehan is a former bouncer, garbage collector and sparring partner who recently catapulted to prominence when he put some hurt on WBO champ Lamon Brewster. Brewster may have eked out the decision to go along with his broken jaw that night, but Kali Meehan was the star. He was gutsy. He was a bruiser. He was white and he could box. Meehan did such a fine job busting up Brewster that he earned himself a shot at Hasim Rahman.

Rahman and his trainer Thell Torrance got The Rock hard and ready to roll for the WBA mandatory against Meehan. Rahman fought smart and he fought dangerous at the opening bell. Meehan was cautious, on the defensive, trying to avoid Rahman’s rushes by jabbing and stepping to the side. It almost looked like Checkmate came to New York to play some chess at Madison Square Garden, but boxing is Rahman’s game. He drew first blood from Meehan’s nose in round two and had Meehan wobbling on the robes at the bell. Rahman took complete charge in round three. His superb conditioning and explosive ways etched an epitaph on Meehan’s face. Checkmate’s corner threw in the towel at the end of the fourth. Hasim Rahman is back.

The co-main feature at the Garden spotlighted IBF champion Chris Byrd (37-2-1 20 KOs) defending his title against Jameel “Big Time” McCline (31-4-3 19 KOs). Despite the disparity in height, weight and strength between the two men, despite the fact that they are friends, this was the fight of the night. Byrd is the champ and on the downside of his career, while McCline is still contending, so this seemed like Jameel’s best and last chance to win the heavyweight title. Too bad he was fighting a master boxer named Chris Byrd.

Byrd is one of the most hated heavyweight champs in history. Even though he has held the crown for several years and fought everyone willing to get it on, he is despised by most fans, because he doesn’t stand and trade, because he has the skills to not stand and trade, which some folks find boring. But since the game is called Boxing, and is not called Knockout, we can assume Byrd knows what he is doing.

Byrd and McCline had a feeling out period in the first. Then Jameel went Byrd hunting. McCline caught the champ in the second and knocked him to the deck. Byrd beat the count and survived the round. The challenger chased Byrd, confident that his superior firepower would do the trick, which it did whenever he landed. The first third of the fight belonged to McCline.

Byrd turned it up in the middle rounds and peppered McCline’s face with combinations. There was nothing Jameel could do but try to catch the elusive Byrd, which has been hard for almost everyone he fought, no less than for a giant like McCline.

Although he was rocked in the tenth round, the last third of the fight was all Chris Byrd. McCline was focused and resilient, at the top of his game, but he was too slow, too inexperienced, too

one-dimensional, his boxing skills inferior to those of Chris Byrd. It went to the judges after twelve competitive rounds. Byrd beat McCline by a split decision.

The main event of the evening was a WBA championship fight between John “The Quiet Man” Ruiz (40-4-1 28 KOs) defending his title against the challenger Andrew Golota (34-5-1 31 KOs). Those who have seen Ruiz fight before knew what to expect going in. When Ruiz wins, he wins ugly. When he loses, he loses ugly. Although he has been a titleholder for many years, he is a graceless brawler who will do whatever it takes to win. He is one part tough guy and all-around grappler, the champ who causes the Marquis of Queensberry to spin in his grave along with his stupid rules.

Andrew Golota took this bout after the rematch with Byrd could not be made. Golota knew this was going to be a foul-filled fight which could push him to the edge, so he thought ahead and prepared for the worst. Ruiz came out at the opening bell and quickly established the fight’s punch-clinch-punch-clinch pattern. Although Golota has the better boxing skills, he allowed Ruiz to get off first, before he tied up the Pole for some dirty inside fighting. Golota didn’t seem to mind. He joined in the fouling. Rabbit punches were thrown. As were blows thrown after the bell.

There were some highlights to the bout. Golota dropped Ruiz early and followed it up with a shove to the canvas and shot behind the head. Cornermen jumped into the ring at inopportune times and understandably cursed the ref. Ruiz cut Golota above the eye with a left hook late in round nine. Golota floored Ruiz in the tenth. It was Golota’s fight to lose, but lose it he didn’t. It just wasn’t his night. After twelve unsightly rounds, the judges robbed Golota and gave the decision to Ruiz.

At the end of a long evening of fights chockfull of few surprises, the big winners were Chris Byrd and Hasim Rahman - with a nod going to Jameel McCline and Larry Donald - and of course the promoter Don King. When asked if he would let any of his titleholders fight each other to unify the titles, King replied, “Yes, they’ll fight anybody. That’s what it’s all about. You can fight any one of them. You got Lamon Brewster. You got Chris Byrd. And you got the fight with Danny and the other guy, although Rahman is the mandatory, so Rahman will be fighting the other guy. I’ll allow any of them to fight for the title. That’s what it’s really about, getting one undisputed champion. That’s the mission that we are on, to have one undisputed champion. And that’s what we’re going to do.”

Only time will tell if King lets one of his champs fight the other guy, even though that’s what it’s really about.