BERLIN—The final press conference prior to John “The Quietman” Ruiz’s defense of his World Boxing Association heavyweight championship against Nicolay “Giant Russian” Valuev, which will take place on Saturday at Max Schmeling Halle here in Berlin, was staged today before a full audience at the Maritim proArte Hotel.

The fight will be shown on free German television on ARD channel 1 but will not be seen in America and is co-presented by Berlin-based Sauerland Event, promoter of Valuev, and Don King Productions, promoter of Ruiz.

The assembled German media seemed interested and curious to be covering the build up to a rare occurrence: a world heavyweight championship being determined in Berlin.

The press conference took place adjacent to the U.S. Embassy and a stone’s throw from the seat of government for Germany, the Reichstag and Bundeskanzleramt (the Reichstag is to Congress what the Bundeskanzleramt is to the White House).

Another 500 yards down the road is the site of the former Berlin Wall.

Today, a unified Berlin is a bustling, modern city of about 3.5 million people that is in the middle of its winter weather, which is almost always overcast and chilly.

Santa Claus and his reindeer are ubiquitous in this capital city with posters throughout town announcing the return of the annual holiday Wienacht Circus featuring, you guessed it, Santa Claus and more reindeer.

It will be staged on the former site of the castle of the Prussian Monarchy, where the German emperors lived beginning in 1871 with Wilhelm I. Frederic III took over in 1888 but he died after just 100 days. Wilhelm II then came to power until being exiled to Holland after World War I, ending the German monarchy and paving the way for the first German Republic.

The castle of Prussia no longer stands. It was bombed during World War II and later completely removed by the communist East German government after they took over in 1949, thus making it a perfect site for the circus.

Noteworthy in their holiday spirit, Berliners seem to have saved some of the old world flavor of the season as compared to what is seen in most malls of America during December. Shopping and eating at open-air clusters of temporary booths abound on various streets and corners throughout the heart of Berlin creating a festive holiday atmosphere.

Many of these booths are operated by craftsmen who have traveled into the city from the surrounding countryside to sell items they have created themselves for sale.

The undefeated, No. 1-challenger Valuev, who stands 7 feet and weighed in for his last fight against Larry Donald at an astonishing 324½ pounds, was asked by a reporter to explain how he obtained his “Beast from the East” nickname. He explained that was done by former management and that he now prefers the “Giant Russian” moniker.

A better description may be provided visually when Valuev enters the ring. He doesn’t step through the ropes; he steps OVER them!

Valuev says Ruiz’s star-studded world championship fight record including wins over Evander Holyfield, Kirk Johnson, Hasim Rahman, Fres Oquendo and Andrew Golota do not faze him.

“I am not any more nervous for this fight because it is my first world championship match,” Valuev said. “I will try to keep Ruiz away from inside clinching to use my height and reach advantages to prevail.

John Ruiz has been in Berlin for a week and was also polite when he spoke, noting this was the first time he has visited Germany.

“I’m honored to be in Germany defending my title,” Ruiz said. “If a KO comes it comes. That just means I get to leave work early. I’m coming into this fight in great shape to go 12 rounds.

“I’m not worried about his height or reach advantage. I trained to fight and will come to fight. My game plan is to take the fight to him, which will neutralize any height or reach advantage.”

When asked if he fears the bout going the distance, Ruiz spoke plainly: “I know there have been questionable decisions [in Germany] but what can I do? I can only do my best.”

One journalist asked Ruiz if it was true that he arrived in Berlin with 28 pieces of luggage, and if so, why?

“We plan to bring pieces of the giant Russian back to the United States” he quipped. “We’re going to give them out as Christmas presents.”

Ruiz’s manager Norman Stone, normally colorful, was uncharacteristically demure in addressing the Berlin media.

“We respect Valuev,” Stone said. “He’s a big guy and a tough guy and anything can happen. That’s why preparation is so important. Johnny’s prepared. My guy’s ready and it’s going to be a great fight.”