

## Nicolay Valuev's Big Surprise

Written by Robert Mladinich  
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When Nicolay Valuev, the 7'0", 324-pound behemoth, won the WBA heavyweight title by majority decision from John Ruiz in Valuev's adopted hometown of Berlin, Germany, he injected some much-needed curiosity into the excruciatingly dull heavyweight division.

Whether or not he can capitalize on it is yet to be seen. What is apparent is that the likeable poetry-writing, 32-year-old Valuev – who passed through New York in June 2001 while en route to Atlantic City for his lone United States appearance – is without question the biggest heavyweight you will ever see.

Although he was billed as being 7'0" against Ruiz, his former American promoter Don Elbaum insisted he was 7'2". After seeing him up close or in action (he made the 6'2", 237-pound Ruiz look like a middleweight), you can't help but marvel at his tremendous physical size.

While Ruiz quipped that Valuev's head was the size of a Volkswagen, ShoBox announcer Steve Farhood was even less conservative in his estimation.

"From purely physical dimensions, he is scary," said Farhood. "My image of him is just sheer enormity."

Valuev, who was born in St. Petersburg, Russia, but now lives in Germany, is so big he makes both Wladimir and Vitali Klitschko look small. With a record of 43-0 (31 KOs), it would seem natural that a pairing between him and either of the Ukrainian brothers would be a natural, especially in Germany where all three enjoy immense popularity.

"This guy is going to bring Vitali out of retirement," said John Scully, who unsuccessfully challenged IBF light heavyweight champion Henry Maske in Berlin and also fought another local favorite, Graciano Rocchigiani, in the same city.

Scully, who now trains heavyweight contender Lawrence Clay Bey, accepted a bout for his fighter with Valuev, only to see Clay Bey turned down by Valuev's management. Clay Bey wound up battling Sinan Samil Sam on the same February 2005 card in which Valuev destroyed onetime prospect Attila Levin.

"Valuev sent Levin into retirement," said Scully. "He beat him up really bad and stopped him in the third round. Levin is a really big guy (6'5") and he looked tiny next to him. He said he got exhausted trying to reach him. And when he did, it was like hitting a brick wall."

While Scully was impressed with Valuev against Levin, he was not so impressed by the way he looked against Ruiz. However, he explains that nobody looks good against Ruiz, so you can't use a fight with him as any kind of parameter.

"You could watch anyone against Ruiz and think he's terrible," said Scully. "Then in his next

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fight, he would look great.”

Farhood is not even close to being ready to anoint Valuev the savior of a moribund division. “What’s not a good sign is the fact that he struggled with Larry Donald, who he barely beat on his home turf,” said Farhood, referring to the bout immediately prior to the one against Ruiz.

“He’s painfully slow and he can’t punch, but he jabs well, paces himself well, and doesn’t get exhausted after three rounds. For the most part those are good signs.”

It has already been announced that Valuev’s next fight will be against an opponent to be determined in April in Berlin. With the number one and two WBA spots vacant, the number-three rated Wladimir Klitschko is Valuev’s mandatory challenger.

While Scully thinks that fight would be a perfect pairing, Farhood thinks accepting such a bout right now would be a mistake on Valuev’s part.

“I think the boxing skills of both Klitschkos would enable them to walk through Valuev,” he said. “If [Valuev] is a novelty act, I suggest he stay in Germany. If he is capable of beating the best heavyweights, I’d say bring him to the United States. My guess is that right now he is the former, not the latter.”

Farhood believes that Valuev could probably handle such second-tier opponents as Evander Holyfield, Jameel McCline, Dominick Guinn or Owen Beck, but suggests that he steer clear of the top fighters in the division.

Scully, however, is a bit more optimistic about Valuev’s future. He mentions that Valuev stopped some fairly decent fringe contenders and former prospects on his way up. Among them were Richard Bango, Paolo Vidoz, Gerald Nobles (W DQ 4), Levin, and Clifford Etienne. He didn’t stop Donald, but few people do.

“All things considered, I’d pick Valuev to [beat either of the Klitschkos],” said Scully. “A lot of people think of [him] as a slow, goofy guy, but he’s more fluid than he gets credit for. He’s got a good work rate and he’s consistent. He does little things well. He’s going to surprise a lot of people.”