The heavyweight division needs a lift. The heavyweight division also needs a star. Whether it needs Oscar De La Hoya to provide both remains to be seen but it got them and him anyway Monday when De La Hoya's powerful promotional company climbed into the heavyweight division by signing undisputed cruiserweight champion David Haye to a five-year deal to exclusively promote him in the United States and co-promote him alongside Haye's newly created company in England.

De La Hoya's uncanny ability to land dates from U.S. cable giant HBO, which many of his competitors feel is suspect at best and restraint of trade at the worst, played an instrumental role in making that deal, but De La Hoya's dominance of the marketplace cannot provide Haye with what he will need most to compete successfully among boxing's biggest practitioners – a reinforced mandible.

Haye is many things, including charismatic, fit and handsome, all of which separate him from nearly every other heavyweight in the world but Wladimir Klitschko. He can also punch with mind-numbing authority, especially with the right hand, as his 21-1 record with 20 knockouts makes clear. But whether his chin is up to the task of standing up to a heavyweight's assault remains a question yet to be fully answered.

Can a man knocked to the floor by an African super middleweight of little note named Lolenga Mack stand up to the punches of the powerful Nigerian Samuel Peter, who presently holds the WBC version of the heavyweight title?

Can a fighter stopped by a well-faded Carl Thompson inside five rounds four years ago take the kind of wallop that comes from someone like Klitschko, who holds the IBF and WBO versions of the title and has stopped 44 of his 50 victims inside the distance?

Those are questions even the head of De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions conceded remain unanswered, thus creating a mystery and an intrigue around Haye that few other heavyweights can claim.

"That is the question,'' Golden Boy CEO Richard Schaefer said in London when asked about the sturdiness of Haye's chin after signing him to a multi-fight deal. "This guy has the opportunity to step up and make an impact.''

That assumes his chin, which let Haye down in his only loss four years ago against Thompson and has left him in trouble against other cruiserweights, can handle the sudden impact of someone like Klitschko or any of the other top heavyweights, whoever those people may be.

That question will take time to sort itself out but when Haye was in Las Vegas for the Joe Calzaghe-Bernard Hopkins fight he told two acquaintances at Calzaghe's post-fight victory party, "I'm what this division needs. I'm a breath of fresh air.

"It's disgraceful the state of the heavyweights. I don't see anyone to be worried about. Can I take their punch? Maybe the question is can they take my punch? I'll make some noise.''

Haye has already begun doing the latter after doing quite a bit of the former on his way to unifying the cruiserweight titles. Twice he's called out Klitschko, the first time even before officially relinquishing the WBC, WBA and WBO cruiserweight championships he briefly held after knocking out Enzo Maccarinelli in less than two rounds a few months back.

While conceding he will fight two top 10 rated heavyweights before going after Klitschko in earnest, Haye insisted there is no other heavyweight he's truly interested in facing because while the titles may be fractured universally Klitschko is seen as the best heavyweight of a bad bunch. There's also no other opponent with whom Klitschko can make real money beside himself. Certainly with the added power of both De La Hoya and HBO behind him as well as Setanta Sports, the British cable company with whom Haye also signed a long-term deal to televise his fights exclusively throughout the UK, Haye has a point there.

De La Hoya left no loose ends during this negotiation, first selling a minority interest in his promotional company to Anschutz Entertainment Group (AEG), which owns the O2 Arena in London, before closing the deal with Haye. That is significant because Haye had previously signed a deal to fight his next four heavyweight fights at the O2 Arena.

Obviously, HBO and De La Hoya will want to see Haye fighting in the U.S. sooner rather than later and certainly would balk at a Klitschko-Haye fight landing anywhere but in Las Vegas, with its lucrative site fees and the logistical advantages in terms of hotel space and hype that a casino setting provides the promoter.

Although Haye's deal with AEG specifies his next four fights are to be at O2, De La Hoya's new partnership with AEG all but assures that can be avoided, although perhaps not until Haye twice tests himself in the division while Klitschko takes care of the two mandatory title defenses he must make before the year is out.

Haye's only fight at heavyweight thus far was a first round stoppage of Poland's Tomasz Bonin last year prior to returning to 200 pounds and unifying the cruiserweight championship in emphatic fashion by knocking out first WBC and WBA champion Jean Marc Mormeck in seven and then WBO title holder Maccarinelli in two. Although British promoter Frank Warren has already offered Haye $1.2 million to fight Commonwealth heavyweight champion Matt Skelton in the fall at O2 Arena in his first heavyweight fight since relinquishing the cruiserweight titles, De La Hoya is leaning toward someone more familiar to the American public, like former heavyweight champion and Lennox Lewis conqueror Hasim Rahman.

Regardless of whom it ends up being, Haye is confident it won't matter.

"I'll fight two top 10 heavyweights and obliterate them,'' Haye promised. "If I didn't believe I could meet my own expectations I wouldn't be doing this. I'll show the world what heavyweight boxing can be. The division is a disgrace. I'll bring the excitement.''

What Haye also promised was that he would unify the heavyweight title despite the fact he has seen that poor Klitschko is already burdened with mandatory requirements that preclude more lucrative fights while holding only half of the four major title belts.

To do any of that however, first Haye's chin must prove to be more resilient than it has been in the past. Of course, that's part of his appeal. Either he gets you or you get him, so mystery and edginess abound whenever he gets into the ring.

Haye's punching power was legendary among cruiserweights and seems likely to be carried with him when he moves up. But being chin challenged in the opinion of many makes Haye even more intriguing because every time he enters the ring against boxing's heaviest hands no one will be quite sure who will survive. Does his superior speed compared with most of today's heavyweights, combined with his crushing power with the straight right hand make him unbeatable, as for a long time Evader Holyfield was after he became the first cruiserweight champion to successfully pursue the heavyweight title? Or does a mandible made of mush doom his efforts despite having the promotional power of De La Hoya behind him?

Haye, for one, believes speed is power and he's the heavyweight who has the most of both. Hence, how can he go wrong?

"I don't want to lose my speed (by getting too heavy or going up in weight too quickly) because I believe speed is the key to becoming heavyweight champion,'' Haye told the BBC.

That and the promotional power of Oscar De La Hoya, whose decision to finally venture into boxing's most important weight class seems to signal the division's possible revival. That assumes, of course, that no one has to revive David Haye before he ever gets to Wladimir Klitschko.