

Sink Or Swim Time For Valuev

Written by Phil Woolever
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DUSSELDORF - Some punchstat pundits, citing a lackluster, inconclusive initial encounter between Nikolai Valuev and John Ruiz wonder what the point is to the upcoming August 30th rematch.

On a primary level, it hopefully fills a void left when WBA titlist Ruslan Chagaev, who subsequently outpointed Valuev, was injured while preparing for a rematch with Valuev a couple months back.

From a promotional perspective, that's secondary motivation.

Besides what's shaping up as a big, euro-spending crowd (at a current rate of around +150 to the dollar) at Berlin's Max Schmelling Halle where their first fight was also held, there might be more to Valuev- Ruiz II than meets the cynical eye.

Big buck things in fact, like a clash with David Haye, Sam Peter, or one of the Klitschko brothers.

Despite an unpopular boxing/holding style, Ruiz has always been ready to take on anybody. After necessary rudimentary nurturing, Valuev is showing he's cut from the same earnest mettle cloth, though at 7'0 he needs a yard or two more of it.

Marketing reality indicates that if "The Russian Giant" could become the only man besides David Tua among many top heavyweights to stop Ruiz, Valuev would vault himself into the thick of the top dollar scene.

TheSweetScience.com caught up with Valuev for some comments from his final training camp in Kienbaum, a well known East German location approximately 20 miles outside Berlin. Picture a European version of the Catskills.

"Practice has been going very well," said Valuev. "The preparation started in St. Petersburg (Russia) and then moved on to Berlin in early August. I feel very well here and have the best possible conditions so I can prepare for this most important fight. It's great to return to Germany. I am eager for a chance to regain a title."

"I have changed a lot in the past couple of weeks and months. With my new coach Alexander Zimin we worked very hard on improving my technique, and I have become much more self-confident in the ring."

Valuev sees the task as business, with no personal issues regarding Ruiz, who's been stoking the prefight fire with a few incendiary statements about the first fight.

"I don't really know Ruiz as a person, so I can not say anything about that," said Valuev. "As a

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boxer? He was the WBA champion for quite a while and he is a very experienced fighter, so I have a lot of respect for him."

"I never give any predictions but I will give all I can to leave the ring victorious. Of course the fight will be different from our first meeting in December 2005. Since then we have both changed. But I think Ruiz will stick to his (previous) style. In his last fight against (Jameel) McClintock he punched more. But then again it depends on the opponent and whether he will allow you to punch a lot or not."

Valuev isn't looking past Ruiz, and talk of currently higher profile opponents down the line doesn't seem to preoccupy him.

"If there will be an interesting offer from the USA my promoters will certainly take a close look at it," said Valuev. "I would love to fight Chagaev again. It is a pity we could not fight this summer."

Reports from Germany indicate Valuev is very relaxed heading in to the fight, and media PR releases show him involved in a variety of leisurely sporting activities.

Valuev turned 35 on August 21st, and the big birthday boy got a surprise visit from his wife. Breaking training jokes aside, he does seem in a calm, confident state of mind.

Valuev offered a personal statement to our website's fans.

"I wish every Sweet Science reader the best," says Valuev. "May you have health and success in everything you do in the future."

"It has been a long time since the first fight (with Ruiz). We have analyzed it closely and I've been working hard with my coach to improve. We have drawn our conclusions. I am a different fighter now, and I will prove that on August 30th."

Valuev seems like a decent sort of character, and at this stage of the heavyweight scene, character can go a long way.

Ruiz is a decent fellow and fighter himself.

So we've got a couple of decent guys, meeting for decent, if not top-tier laurels.

Let's hope this time around it's a really decent duke-out.