BERLIN -- It was billed as “Dangerzone” but Vitali Klitschko’s disarming of Samuel Peter ultimately carried few risks. Likewise, Germany’s capital city proved to be a pleasant setting for the heavyweight title fight.

Berlin has evolved progressively since John F. Kennedy announced “Ich bin ein Berliner”, developing into a fashionable municipality boasting a range of cultures, the new headquarters of MTV Europe and the largest assortment of museums on the continent.

Accordingly, the attendees of Saturday’s big fight were a gathering of classy women and jacket-wearing males, with a few flat-nosed former pugs and ex-Soviet territory oligarchs completing the audience. Moreover, there was only a light scattering of the rowdy young men that customarily make up a boxing crowd.

Boxing, or “boxen” as it is locally known, is headline news in Germany, with free-to-view television networks such as RTL drawing viewing figures in tens of millions to shows featuring talent from across Europe.

Over 12,000 patrons packed the new O2 World Arena to see the return of “Dr. Eisenfaust” Klitschko and the venue is expected to be a staple on the German fight scene. A night at the fights still holds glamorous appeal in Berlin.

“Everyone watches boxing here,” said a local taxi driver last Saturday. “The O2 Arena is the new place to be. It means the end of the Max Schmeling Halle [the previous home of big fights in Berlin].”

O2 is a major cellular phone company that is putting its name on a number of “super arenas” across Europe featuring an abundance of corporate boxes and bars. It makes a change from naming a location after a legendary sportsman, but commercial money drives profits.

Similarly, merchandise sales seem to account for big business in Germany. On Saturday, this writer spotted one fan shelling out €270 [$365] on a variety of Klitschko-related shirts, baseball caps and posters. And his exuberance was not an isolated case as much of the crowd were carrying plastic bags stuffed with fight-related memorabilia from the show that was promoted by the Klitschko brothers’ K2 Promotions in association with Duva Boxing and Don King.

While the fight fans had few reservations about expressing their enthusiasm in monetary terms, vocally they are a more reserved and cordial crowd than would frequent boxing events in the US and UK.

They demonstrated admirable tolerance in sitting through Odlanier Solis’ drab encounter with Chauncy Welliver. Despite being a former Olympic gold medallist, Solis seems to have a pedestrian work ethic inside the ring, while his physical appearance suggests a similar attitude

away from boxing. But his fleshy midsection had nothing on Welliver's grossly overweight 282-pound body, complete with jelly-like breasts that wobbled incessantly throughout the nine round tussle.

The irony of two blubbery fighters competing on a canvas featuring a huge "McFit" logo was not lost on one loud British fan who rhetorically asked "Who ate all the pies?!"

Still, the rest of the crowd politely applauded the end of each round and gave both fighters a generous ovation as the fight ended with Solis clubbing Welliver into submission to register his twelfth pro win. Bizarrely, after the victory Solis was announced by the master of ceremonies as "the new World Boxing Council International heavyweight champion of the world."

It didn't take the crowd much time to realize they weren't watching championship material in Julius Long. The 7' tall Detroit native seemed to startle the local onlookers by his sheer size and effortless step over the top ring rope. Yet their fascination with the "Towering Inferno" lasted less than three minutes as Alexander Ustinov flatted Long for the ten count with a straight right cross.

"Long went down like the Dow Jones stock index," quipped one ringsider.

The use of an all-white ring and intense spotlights is a regular feature at major German boxing shows. The lights point in various directions around the arena during breaks in a contest, creating individual laser-like beams that contrast vividly with the dark background. The resulting effect can make it difficult to tell whether some seats in the distance are occupied or empty, as the range of beams produce a mist-like haze. But when a round is about to begin, the myriad of spotlights focus on the ring, converging into one concentrated bright shaft of light that complements the white canvas.

In the lead up to the main event the crowd was almost eerily quiet, with low-key conversations prevailing over any pre-fight hysteria. But things got a whole lot livelier when Michael Buffer said "Let's get this party started!" and introduced the pop group Pussycat Dolls. The five-girl ensemble performed their latest hit single and gyrated around the ring to the lyrics "Be careful what you wish for 'cos you just might get it". The male portion of the audience probably didn't agree with their advice.

The well-organized show continued with a theatrical video juxtaposition of five legendary heavyweight champions. George Foreman, Joe Frazier, Lennox Lewis, Evander Holyfield and Mike Tyson appeared on the arena's big screens with resolute messages of encouragement for Vitali. They obviously thought little of Peter.

The image of "Iron Mike" drew the loudest cheer, but that ovation turned into a chorus of whistles as Don King climbed into the ring, carrying a conglomerate of flags that would match any United Nations convention.

The controversial "old-timers" theme continued with the appearance of 77-year-old José Sulaimán at ringside, although the German crowd didn't seem to have any venom for the

alphabet group president who on this night was championing insignificant “International” titles and an open scoring system.

A five minute video feature documenting Vitali’s decision to make a comeback and his wife’s nervousness at his choice was broadcast on the arena’s screens, but any sense of sentimentality was quickly dissipated when Klitschko began his long ringwalk to the strains of AC/DC’s “Hell’s Bells”.

A large contingent of Ukrainian fans, adorned in their nation’s yellow and blue colors, made themselves heard as the former champion made his appearance. Vitali’s efforts to rid his homeland of corruption have seen him unsuccessfully run for the mayor of Kiev post on two occasions, but his attempts to rid Samuel Peter of his senses proved much more popular with the crowd.

Chants of “Vi-ta-li, Vi-ta-li” briefly resonated in the early rounds, but the majority of onlookers seemed content to sit back and absorb the action. Yet Vitali’s brother, world titlist Wladimir, was unable to contain his emotions, relentlessly mimicking his sibling’s every move while shouting instructions from the corner.

A sustained slow hand clap reverberated on a number of occasions, but in Germany this is a sign of appreciation, meaning the onlookers were impressed with Klitschko’s sharp combinations and total dominance.

Despite his occasional resemblance to a malfunctioning robot, Vitali’s jerky style again proved to be most effective, as Peter’s surrender after eight rounds silenced the critics who doubted the sturdiness of Klitschko’s 37-year-old body. Whether he can regularly defend his newly won title is questionable, but one certainty will be the absence of a unified champion as long as Wladimir holds a portion of the title.

As Vitali made his way from the ring a fan remarked on the new titlist’s future prospects.

“Vitali will easily beat the other champion if they fight,” he said.

“But Vitali says he will never fight his brother,” offered this writer.

Retorted the fan: “Not him, the other world champion, Solis.”