

HAYE=Fresh Face, Fresh Start For The Division

Written by Ron Borges

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It's not easy to make hay in the heavyweight division these days, as Wladimir Klitschko proved last weekend and Nikolay Valuev is about to find out when he faces aged Evander Holyfield Saturday night in Zurich.

But one hope of making hay remains and that is if David Haye can make mince meat out of WBC champion Vitali Klitschko next summer at an arena somewhere in London. That, it now appears, is where the Hayemaker, Britain's newest heavyweight hopeful, will challenge the elder of the two Klitschko boys for some portion of the biggest title in boxing.

This assumes the WBC cooperates, which may be a longer shot than the 6-7 Klitschko's in-seam but then again, who cares about the WBC or any of the sanctioning bodies that have conspired to turn boxing into an irrelevancy?

Haye announced to the world on BBC Radio this week that he and Klitschko had agreed to terms last weekend in Mannheim, Germany, where Haye had gone to watch Klitschko's brother Wladimir waste too many rounds beating up Hasim Rahman.

In Haye's opinion at least all that remains is to "dot the i's and cross the t's." In most business deals that would not seem to be a major problem but this is heavyweight boxing, where everything is a problem including finding a heavyweight anyone wants to watch these days.

One could be the loquacious, undefeated former cruiserweight champion because David Haye possesses the things that sell in prize fighting – a dynamite punch, a dynamite smile and a chin that tends to explode like a stick of dynamite went off when hit. The former give him selling points. The latter gives him the sort of vulnerability that creates interest or at least mystery.

What Klitschko possesses is 1/4th of the heavyweight title (or 3/4s if you add his younger brother's half share and make it a family affair), a long jab and thudding power. He also has a plodding style and far less athleticism than Haye, which makes it easy to see ways Haye could outbox and out brawl him. Then again, his chin has always seemed sturdy, even when struck by Lennox Lewis, so there is that to recommend him as well against Haye's fusillades.

What is most important though is that this is the one heavyweight title fight paying customers might actually want to see, at least those who have heard of Haye. Haye labored in the long and unfairly ignored cruiserweight division for the past six years, piling up a 21-1 record and unifying the title in his last fight at that weight when he stopped Enzo Maccarinelli in two rounds. That came on the heels of unifying half the titles by taking out Jean Marc Mormeck in seven and led to a decision to move up and challenge for the heavyweight title.

Haye (22-1, 21 KO) has fought only twice at heavyweight, stopping journeyman former contender Monte Barrett in five rounds last month to set the stage for a dramatic step up in class and experience next year against Klitschko if all goes as agreed to.

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The 28-year-old Haye could be the key to unlocking the long dormant interest in the heavyweights, who have gone all but unnoticed since the retirement of Lewis 5 1/2 years ago after stopping the elder Klitschko on cuts in Los Angeles.

Since then many have held various portions of the title but none in a way that captured the imagination of the public. Even with the firm backing of HBO's money and publicity machine, neither Klitschko has been able to convince anyone outside of Larry Merchant's living room that either are particularly great heavyweights. What they are, it has seemed, is fortuitous ones who came along at a time when there is little talent in the division.

But now Haye at least has the opportunity to create a spark of fever because if he can dethrone the elder Klitschko it would set up a logical unification fight with his younger brother that would carry with it the heat of a revenge factor for Wladimir, who would be out not only to unify the title but also to avenge his older brother's defeat against a guy who not only can fight but also can talk.

"This is going to be the biggest fight since Lennox [Lewis] and [Mike] Tyson," Haye told BBC Radio Five Live this week. "I have said from day one I am going to be the undisputed cruiserweight and heavyweight champion. I have not disappointed. I am not cherry-picking, I am going after the most dangerous fighter on the planet."

That might be a stretch but Klitschko (36-2, 35 KO) did come out of a four-year retirement without even a tune up fight and destroy Samuel Peter, a man formerly known as the Nigerian Nightmare until he quit on his stool after taking far more than he wanted from Klitschko for eight bloody rounds.

Now Haye has emerged not only to challenge Klitschko but, more importantly, to offer both a fresh face and a fresh start for a division badly in need of one. So badly, in fact, that even Klitschko's long-time advisor, Bernd Boente, spoke well of Haye this week. Or at least well of the idea of what a Haye-Klitschko-The-Elder fight might do for the division.

"This will be a very big fight across the world," Boente said while confirming the agreement between the two parties and their representatives. "The Klitschkos are heroes in Central and Eastern Europe and it's a fight HBO and Showtime would be very interested in.

"David brings something new and exciting. He looked great against Monte Barrett, who [WBA title-holder] Nikolay Valuev took 11 rounds to stop. Haye KO'd him in five rounds. He's young, hungry and very fast. It's a huge fight."

Boente made clear Klitschko would not allow any shenanigans by the WBC, which is demanding he fight a mandatory defense against former cruiserweight champion Juan Carlos Gomez first, to interfere and he is quite right on that point. If Klitschko intends to fight a former cruiserweight champion there is only one the world will buy and that's the 215-pound Haye.

"We'll talk to the WBC, but we'll go ahead with or without them," Boente said assuredly. "This fight is bigger than the WBC belt."

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Actually it is bigger than any other fight in the division as well. Not because anyone fully believes Haye is the answer or even a proven commodity because he is not. In fact, he was wobbled by Barrett and has already been stopped once and down several times against various cruiserweights so the fact could be that his chin is simply too fractured to stand up against a 6-7, 250-plus pound opponent with 35 knockouts in 36 victories. Yet he also has shown what promoter Don King might call "double shock power" himself, the kind of one-punch force that makes heavyweight legends and sells heavyweight numbers of tickets.

With his proven power, suspect chin and charming charisma, David Haye is what the heavyweight division has been longing for. Now all he has to do is the dangerous part, which is avoid Klitschko's power long enough to deliver a knockout blow for boxing. If he does it next June in London it will have resuscitated the division and set up a bigger match with Klitschko's little brother.

If David Haye can do all that, he will have saved the heavyweight division from itself, which is more difficult than beating Vitali Klitschko, or his brother, will ever be.