If Vitali Klitschko wants to unify half the heavyweight title as much as he says does, he should volunteer to pay a price for it. He should do what Evander Holyfield did years ago and gamble on himself, which he did when he agreed to take $4 million less than his advisors thought it was worth to fight Mike Tyson.

The rest, as they say, is history, which is what Tyson became not long after Holyfield knocked him out, forcing a rematch for which he was paid a record $25 million purse. For the record, he made Tyson quit again and went on to earn many millions more, although it appears he didn't hold on to many of them.

Now according to Klitschko, a unification fight with WBA title holder Nikolai Valuev is being held hostage by – drum roll – Don King and, to a lesser extent, German promoter Wilfried Sauerland, who in partnership hold the promotional rights to Valuev. Klitschko is insisting he has offered Valuev a 50-50 split, a fair amount considering that each man holds one quarter of the major titles presently in existence. But he also says King is insisting on three years of options on him if he wins, which is absurd but typical if true.

Sauerland, on the other hand, claims Valuev is ready to fight either of the Klitschko brothers, but no serious offer has ever been made. King is saying nothing, but it is difficult to believe he is insisting on three years of options when the Muhammad Ali Act forbids anything more than a year unless the fighter agrees to it, which Klitschko never will.

So where is the truth? Who knows... but it's seldom in boxing.

Sauerland claimed last month he had not heard from either Vitali or brother Wladimir, who wears the WBO, IBF and IBO belts while his brother controls the WBC strap, "in 12 months.'' Klitschko's German manager Bernd Boente claims he spoke with King three weeks ago, and Boente says King demanded a piece of whichever Klitschko he allowed to get into the ring with Valuev, over whom he holds a right of refusal for any bout. So here we go again in boxing.

Meanwhile, the Klitschkos have made clear they will never actually unify the titles because they won't fight each other, holding firm on at least one promise they made in their lives – which was to their mother that they would never fight each other professionally.

The latter sounds fair enough, and so does a 50-50 split with Valuev, assuming that includes all revenues and not merely some of it, which may be a big assumption. King insisting on options comes as no surprise either, although how he gets around the Ali Act is beyond me and hence it is difficult to fathom how any such demand would hold water legally. One has to wonder if that was anything more than posturing by King, assuming it ever happened in the first place.

What is tiresome frankly is that the Klitschkos always seem to have a problem. They had a problem with Hasim Rahman, they had a problem with Samuel Peter, they have a problem with

David Haye, they have a problem with Valuev, they had a problem with their food and water in Las Vegas, they had a problem with Lennox Lewis, and they have a problem with the WBC at the moment. They claim the WBC is trying to force Vitali to make back-to-back mandatory title defenses against Juan Carlos Gomez and then Oleg Maskaev even though WBC president Jose Sulaiman issued a statement saying the organization would approve a Valuev fight if Klitschko defeats Gomez on March 21, which would seem to end that dispute, although it didn't stop Klitschko from filing a complaint with the Court of Arbitration for Sports in Berlin against the WBC a month later.

Why is it that these guys always seem to have a problem? Any time they have lost, it's always been because of some terrible injury no one else saw. They even went so far after the younger Klitschko was knocked cold to claim he'd been "poisoned.'' He was poisoned all right. Leather poisoning from getting hit in the lip.

They have reached a new low at the moment however, with both brothers claiming at the same time that they are being unfairly treated. The elder Klitschko says Valuev's people want too many options but then Boente is quoted saying former cruiserweight champion David Haye is "complaining about options'' Klitschko's people want on him to approve a June title fight. What that sounds like is typical boxing – when you want options it's a fair deal but when someone else wants them its not. So how about no options on Haye and just fight?

That wouldn't get the fight made, according to Boente, because Haye can't deliver a deal for a British soccer stadium, which according to Boente reduces the undefeated Haye to something less than a mandatory challenger and hence means a purse reduction.

Why don't these guys just fight somebody? When the elder Klitschko came out of a four-year retirement he got an automatic title shot against Peter his first fight back. Didn't have to face anyone despite having not been in the ring with a decent heavyweight since Lewis beat his eye out of his head five years earlier. Neither the Klitschko brothers nor Boente were doing any screaming then that they were being given an unfair advantage while bypassing the many working heavyweights who hadn't held the title hostage year after year claiming one injury after another.

These guys have long felt they were a superior life form for whom the rules do not apply. They do all they can not to follow the rules as written (which one has to admit isn't easy to do considering how often the rules are re-written to serve the moment) when that helps them but insist they be applied when that does.

They dictate terms as if they were two guys who actually attract fans, which outside of Germany they don't, as proved by their consistently underwhelming pay-per-view numbers. It's also why half the time they fight in Germany rather than in the U.S., and HBO doesn't insist otherwise.

Boente was quoted saying a fight with Haye "doesn't make sense if he doesn't bring more to the table than a regular challenger like Hasim Rahman or Tony Thompson. Why pay him more than a mandatory challenger?''

Maybe because a few people might actually be interested in watching?

Let us examine, for a moment, who these two guys have beaten. On his “march’’ to the title, Vitali holds wins over Vaughn Bean, Larry Donald, Kirk Johnson, Corrie Sanders, Danny Williams and Peter. He also sandwiched in a four-year layoff in there somewhere.

His brother has beaten a murderer’s row that includes Chris Byrd, Calvin Brock, Ray Austin, Lamon Brewster, Sultan Ibragimov, Thompson and Rahman. The latter, Rahman, had been beaten in his career by Oleg Maskaev, John Ruiz, James Toney, Holyfield and Lewis yet is arguably the best guy Wladimir Klitschko ever beat.

And these guys are making demands and setting terms? What do they bring to the table besides big German TV money? Good PR and HBO’s checkbook. One of these days someone at Time-Warner may actually take a look at what they’ve been paid and ask Ross Greenberg a simple question? Why?

As for Valuev, why should he help the Klitschkos unify half the title when they have no intention of ever unifying all of it? They never had the slightest interest in helping him earlier in his career when his promoter kept trying to lure one of them into the ring.

It seems clear Valuev loses to either Klitschko because he can’t spell F-I-G-H-T let alone actually do it, so the world is hardly crying out for the match despite the Klitschkos’ claims to the contrary. No one cares.

The fact is for all their posturing, pouting, palavering, they own title belts won against lousy opposition. That is not all their fault but most of the sporting world really couldn’t care less about them or the heavyweight division. If they fight, fine. If they don’t, just as fine. Valuev? Haye? Gomez? Chris Arreola?

Who cares?