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GELSENKIRCHEN, GERMANY, NORTH RHINE OR NO WHINE ZONE - Back almost five years to the day before Wladimir Klitschko was scheduled to face David Haye, June 21st, 2003 to be more exact, older Klittschko brother Vitali fought Lennox Lewis at the Staples Center in Los Angeles. That compelling contest remains one of the few bright spots in heavyweight boxing during more than the past decade. People still debate what outcome might or might not have occurred had the bout not been waved off due to extreme cut damage around Klitschko's eye.

Even as Vitali came back after a four year layoff, there were intelligent, heated arguments for or against the merits of a long awaited and long overdue rematch between Lewis and the elder Klitschko.

One point in the discussion was agreed on almost unanimously. It was a very good thing for the sport of boxing that Klitschko and Lewis got it on in the first place, and universally agreed that both men were to be commended for agreeing to meet, somewhat out of the bruising blue.

Now that David Haye has shown that all his talk ended up being pretty cheap and pulled out of the scheduled June 20th fight with Wladimir, citing a hand injury as the cause, the stage is set for another possibility like Lewis-Vitali. All it takes is one giant Russian.

That's right, we're calling on the big boy, Nikolai Valuev to step up and step in.

Haye may or may not have made a good fight of it, he may or may not have emerged, as many fans hoped, as the new champion and "savior" of the dormant division.

It is a mauling moot point now, and after all Haye's squawking insults, I figure unless he's suddenly missing a couple fingers, he should have tried to make the date. Old school heroes probably had to deal with such tribulations many times, and without all the prior trash talk. If Haye indeed has backed out, he should be made to meet someone like Chris Arreola, John Ruiz, or the winner of Alexander Dimetrinko-Eddie Chambers and earn the shot more than he did the first time, which was basically talking his way into it.

Whether Haye's excuse is valid or not, Klitschko now has the right to talk the trash, but he's probably still too classy to do it.

Now, in more ways than one, we've got a classic case of put up or shut up.

After all the contractual hassles to sign Haye in the first place one can imagine Klitschko pounding away at his heavy training bag in frustration muttering eventual quotes about disappointment and lost opportunities.

It doesn't have to be that way.

So let's get back to Valuev, who just had his own fight cancelled last Saturday night in Helsinki. Ruslan Chagaev may have a legitimate complaint about getting passed over, but the fact is, Valuev is currently by far the most reasonable replacement opponent to be found and he definitely should be in fighting shape.

Valuev also brings the possibility of a four belt unification, and puts the heavyweight division much closer to a truly undisputed titlist.

The German fans who made the fight a hot ticket sellout at almost 60,000 seats would probably be just as happy with Valuev on the marquee. Many would probably even consider the match an improvement.

Valuev reportedly lost approximately one and a half million euros in salary. If he offered to step in, he'd likely see that paycheck nearly tripled, if not upped even more.

Both the Klitschko and Valuev camps have done a lot of posturing and promising about how they'd love to face each other.

Now's the time gents.

So here's hoping that Wladimir will take a page from his brother's book and that Valuev will indeed try to emulate Lewis in a championship manner.

Win or lose, both men stand a lot to gain just by signing for the fight.

The time is almost perfect to make the best of a potentially bad situation.

There's no doubt John Ruiz is willing to hop on a plane for shorter money, but in the reality of fans' favor, let's hope it doesn't come to that.

This is a big event that can be saved.

"I've been in training camp for weeks," moaned Klitschko, "I am in top condition and was really looking forward to this fight. I don't want to disappoint the fans in Schalke and I am willing to fight a different opponent as well."

"We will do everything to realize this fight night," guaranteed manager Bernd Bonte. "After recovering from the first shock, we will work on finding a top opponent."

The answer is obvious.

Nikolai Valuev, Sauerland Event and Don King, it's up to you and it's time to put up or shut up.

Wladimir Klitschko and K2 Promotions, due to the crappy circumstances, you might have to give a little in negotiations. Make Haye pay for it later, but for now, do the tens of thousands of fans who proved their loyalty right.

If Klitschko-Valuev doesn't happen while the iron is hot, David Haye isn't the only performer who's championship character should be seriously questioned.