

Whaddya Say, Hooray For The WBA!

Written by Ron Borges

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Sometimes things work out in boxing no matter how hard the World Boxing Association tries to screw the sport up.

The WBA and its counterparts at the World Boxing Council and International Boxing Federation seem to have made it their life's work to make the sport as difficult for its long-suffering fans to fathom as possible. Most of the time they succeed but thanks to Finnish Boxing Federation regulations (who knew they had a boxing federation in Finland...or boxing for that matter?), David Haye's bad back, Ruslan Chagaev's bad blood and Wladimir Klitschko's bad luck at least one of the more absurd situations in a sport of absurd situations seems to have worked itself out in a way that not even the WBA can screw up.

Of course, one should never underestimate them. They could still find a way to do it but Chagaev made it a lot more difficult when he chose to go to work after being told by the Finns he couldn't go to work.

Chagaev has been the WBA's heavyweight champion "in recess" seemingly since he was in pre-school. This situation has dragged on because Chagaev has had an ongoing problem with hepatitis B as well as less alarming ailments, thus managing to be unavailable to fight the WBA's champion not in recess (although many people wish he was in permanent recess) Nikolai Valuev three times.

The third time turned out to be the charm for fight fans when the Finns took umbrage at Chagaev's blood tests coming up positive for the antigen that carries the hepatitis B virus and pulled the plug on his May 30 fight with Valuev.

The Finns insisted Valuev agree to be vaccinated both before and after fighting Chagaev, meaning he had to expose himself to the hepatitis B virus in case he got exposed to the hepatitis B virus. Considering that boxing is a blood sport, Valuev felt engaging in a fist fight with someone carrying hepatitis B in any form might not be the smartest thing and so he declined.

Even so, Chagaev was willing to fight so the WBA said it would make a decision on the future of its champions "in recess" and out of recess by the end of the month. This seemed absurd since Chagaev hadn't made a mandatory defense of the WBA title in over a year but before John Ruiz, Don King and anyone else with access to legal services could file lawsuits to protect their interests, Haye's back went out and he pulled out of his June 20 WBO-IBF title fight with Klitschko.

As it often does in boxing, the fans' good fortune arrived at the expense of someone else, in this case Haye. Chagaev agreed to replace Haye so the show could go on in Germany, where Klitschko's advisors had a 60,000-seat soccer stadium all but sold out for his appearance there.

Since both Klitschko and Chagaev wanted to get paid the fight was made. What happened to

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Chagaev's hep B problem? No problem in Germany, where Klitschko reigns supreme.

The unintended consequences of all this is the good news for it would seem impossible for the WBA to continue insisting Chagaev (25-0-1) is its champion if he A) gets a beatdown from Klitschko or B) gives him one and ends up wearing the IBF and WBO belts.

The bad news is that Valuev (50-1) is now the champion in toto and likely will have to face Ruiz (43-8-1) next as his mandatory challenger. As dismal as that proposition sounds, at least the WBA champion will be someone who's fought in a real title fight lately and, better still, there will only be one of them.

As victories go that's not a huge one but fight fans are so used to doing a lot worse that at least sorting out the WBA mess is a small step in the right direction. Normally you wouldn't be happy about someone having hepatitis B or a bad back but in the odd world of boxing it was good news for everybody but those two guys and anyone looking forward to Haye-Klitschko on HBO.

But then there was even good news on that front. Haye-Klitschko has been put off for a while but at least HBO refused to televise Chagaev-Klitschko.

That's two wins in a week for fight fans.