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RUMBLING ON THE RHEINE - There was a brief spell of bitterness around Ruslan Chagaev's camp after his rematch with Nikolai Valuev was cancelled, but it quickly upgraded to true championship celebratory mode with the signing of this Saturday's bigger bout against consensus kingpin Wladimir Klitschko.

What a difference a duke out day makes.

After the scheduled engagement with Valuev that was supposedly going to clear up Chagaev's ridiculously frustrating WBA "champion in recess" designation got scrapped without a scrap due to even more contradictory information regarding Chagaev's health, hepatitis, and general readiness to engage, Team Chagaev dispatched angry press releases that labeled Valuev a coward and proclaimed that Chagaev was fully healthy and ready to fight.

Valuev responded in PR kind. It seemed the only clear things were more non-definitive combat between the principals outside the ring than inside it, and that Chagaev was probably going to be sitting on his hands more than throwing them.

Even Klitschko chimed in on the situation, basically stating that under similar circumstances he would have just gotten a preventative inoculation and gone forward with the event.

Whatever the case really was in Helsinki, for Chagaev it was probably a blessing in disguise. The WBA may have designated Chagaev's status "under review", but his shot against Klitschko makes any ruling relatively trivial.

Unverifiable figures for how much Chagaev was supposed to earn against Valuev were said to be around a million euros (1.3 million US bucks) or more but now against Klitschko that sum should be at least doubled. Exact purses weren't readily announced or available.

If longshot Chagaev manages to leave the ring in Gelsenkirchen still undefeated, he'll greatly multiply whatever his total take is with either a rematch or a revenge battle against older Klitschko brother Vitali. Rematch clause data was also hidden.

Fine print aside, Chagaev has by far the most to gain Saturday, while Klitschko has much more to lose, including the limited global credibility he's built up in recent appearances.

Meanwhile, like their primary top of the line competitor Sauerland Event (Valuev's promoter), Universum has plenty to be proud and happy about these days.

In Germany, those entities and K2 Promotions (Klitschko Inc.) control the lion's share of the boxing business. Universum and Sauerland have the best stables while the Klitschkos are by far the biggest draws.

Both Sauerland and Universum have plenty of top performers and prospects and this isn't a debate about which stable is superior.
Any competition between the groups is about as close as the pick'em fight between Universum's Felix Sturm and Sauerland's Arthur Abraham shapes up. While that match is unlikely at this point, Sturm may get the first crack at a high profile US opponent like Kelly Pavlik.

The point is each promoter offers a consistently excellent product, which is very good for German fight fans, who respond with packed venues. There are very solid cards throughout Deutschland on more than a monthly basis, with regular extravaganzas and world wide repercussions, like Universum's upcoming Alexander Dimitrenko versus Eddie Chambers tilt.

Chagaev's opportunity against Klitschko seemed to further put his promotional company on a visible high during their recent card featuring Jurgen Brahmer and Denis Boytsov in Oberhausen on June 6th. Both starring fighters came through with big performances, which was icing on the corporation's conking cake.

Brahmer made a statement by immediately blasting out the previously unstopped Antonio Brancalion, who respectably admitted he'd never been hit like that before. Brahmer, 32-2, should get another title shot soon and if he sticks to present form Universum will have another champion in the fold.

There's a strong possibility that the best of tomorrow's heavyweights could be brawny Boytsov, who looked very impressive as he stopped willing but soon steamrolled stablemate Taras Bidenko. Boytsov is ready to try and crack the top ten worldwide. I'd like to see him against tricky Juan Carlos Gomez, or better yet John Ruiz. Boytsov against Chris Arreola would be best of all.

Meanwhile, cheerful administrative staff and fellow training campers from the well groomed stable gave the ringside sections a classy, office party atmosphere between undercard contests.

A very animated Susi Kentikian joked with fans who lined up to pose for pictures all evening.

From what I've seen Universum has the best female team on the globe, with Kentikian, Alesia Graf, Esther Schouten, plus the gal I think looked best of the female fighters I've seen, Ina Menzer.

The whole gang will probably be in the arena for Chagaev's big night. And while I think it's going to be a surprise for even Chagaev's closest associates if Ruslan can get inside effectively, it seemed Universum head man Klaus-Peter Kohl wasn't overly worried about protecting his guy's undefeated record. Kohl was very cheerful during this week's press conference as if he knew having a fighter lose was sometimes simply a cost of doing business, and business was all good.

Supposedly, Valuev turned down the business for this week that Chagaev jumped at. If so, I

don't know what Valuev was thinking, except maybe that he could return to Switzerland for another Holyfield fight which would probably be a huge payday with the very realistic possibility that a Klitschko fight would be worth even more later.

That might be smart management, but it gave Chagaev a huge benefit of the doubt regarding whatever went down in Helsinki.
The only person that lost more stock than Valuev around here was David Haye, though his absence may have resulted in ticket returns and available seats. It will be interesting to see how the much cited "sell out crowd of 60,000" ends up looking. As of Tuesday here, there were tickets available for around 30 US dollars through non-scalping/secondary sales outlets.

We'll soon see if the nosebleed section ends up inside the strands or as a packed swarm of howlers, neither or both.

As for the battle itself, I'd have to say that unfortunately, the most likely scenario is something like Klitschko's disappointing waltz with Sultan Ibragimov. There's around a 75% chance HBO made the right call in passing on the broadcast, as a cautious Klitschko occasionally thumps a hard headed, durable but ineffective Chagaev.

Let's hope the other combined 25% chances, that either a fired-up Klitschko comes out to make a statement, that Chagaev gets through with his own heavy leather (unlikely based on how he looked against Drumond), or that both men collide at mid ring and let it all hang out until somebody crashes (5% chance at best) come to classic fruition.

The main event remains a question mark, but the scene itself should be great.