

Valuev-Haye Travel Log : More Tales of Two Cities

Written by Phil Woolever

Thursday, 05 November 2009 19:00

PARIS - Valuev-Haye may turn out to be the best of fights, it may be the worst of fights.

Maybe where you watch from will have something to do with it.

Depending on where travel leads you around present day European Union locales, there are different perspectives on the upcoming sporting weekend.

Valuev-Haye is a big deal throughout many parts of Germany and the United Kingdom. Walk down Paris's massive Champs Elysee area, generally quite crowded with an international mix of locals and tourists, and it would be surprising to find anyone aware the fight was even taking place.

While various regional football/soccer leagues are always by far the main event in any EU homeland, if there's not a Formula 1 type race going on, I've often found boxing to rate a strong "place" or "show" in the horse race for public discretionary income to flow in many countries.

It's the other side of a conking coin in the land of the Louvre. Unbelievable art and over-rated restaurants thrive, but it seems the goons who proclaim boxing is a dying game might actually be correct. Merci and pass the Everlasts.

If you're in Berlin or London, there's more than sufficient buzz and media coverage to perceive that there's a big deal about to go down in Nurnberg (German spelling) this weekend, while in many hubs around the UK it is portrayed that local lad Haye is primed to engage in a monumental effort against an almost super-human foe.

Mainstream news coverage is probably deepest in Haye's UK homeland. Even before any of the proposed fights with Valuev or the Klitschkos were considered, I saw or heard enough about the "Hayemaker" in London's central metropolitan area to verify that he definitely had the potential for major stardom.

From reading many UK news releases, it seems the "David vs Goliath" hype has been accepted as factual. Haye squawks about comparisons to Jack Dempsey and Jess Willard and plenty of folks pay serious attention.

The daily Sun, the tabloid type paper with page 3 girls (in Germany some papers put their naked babes on page 1), the often humorous Haye or his ghostwriter has been sending daily dispatches leading up to the fight, including some classic cracks about how Valuev's head has been growing before his eyes.

Thanks due to Haye's charismatic wise guy muscularity and bravado, pay per view numbers could likely turn out quite respectable for the British broadcast.

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In Germany, viewer numbers may not reach Klitschko or "King" Arthur proportions but it's pretty safe to estimate that well over a quarter of the people watching television Saturday night will be tuned in to the fight.

Not so in what I've seen during a few recent trips to France. From the complete lack of any sort of fistic imagery of any sort here, it seems they could televise the bout on free TV during dead air time on other networks and few people would tune in.

A few days of general, admittedly limited observations around the northern tips or Normandy beach areas of France make it seem like the last time anyone laced up boxing gloves was around the time of Georges Carpentier. The only notice of anything even boxing related I saw or heard was a photograph of Ernest Hemingway in sparring gear in a D-day museum ("famous war correspondents"). Sweet scientist AJ Liebling was also noted, but there was nothing to suggest his ties with fistianna.

While hitting various autobahns from hazy mazes in the Netherlands to Belgium jazz festivals, there has always been at least some sort of boxing related milepost, whether it was a fight on TV in an "Irish" bar, (per capita there are tons of them all over in much more than most places I've been in the US) an advertising image, t-shirt, something.

Jack Johnson may have found Paris to be a place he could relocate for sustaining bouts, but that was a distant past.

I'm happy to report matters of the padded glove are still strong across other borders however. The sweet science gets plenty of major play in other European theatres.

It's not impossible to conclude that at least part of the initial Klitschko-Haye proposed encounter at a London football arena was cancelled due to Team Klitschko's awareness of what kind of home court advantage Haye would carry into any fight on British soil.

In other soiled categories, considering how much of the general public's lowest common denominator can make USA reality TV philosophies seem upper crust, Haye's penchant for controversy or low class posturing could actually add to his emergence from Saturday night in Bavaria as a budding mega star.

Win or lose, I'd bet he's still unknown around the Arc de Triumph Sunday morning.

Count on Haye to blow his own horn plenty loud, but while Jim Morrison rests under recently placed bottles or poetry, no one will be blowing auto horns up and down the streets like they did after Team France's most recent home football win.

Still, the stakes are very high in Arena Nurnberger Saturday night, whoever is or isn't watching.

The better fighter will come away with the WBA belt, and the title will be worth at least 20 per cent more than it was before the contest.

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Besides physical prowess, or technique the outcome could have a lot to do with state of mind.

As always, I'm hoping the match lives up to it's dramatic potential. If Haye finally puts his mauling money where his mouth is, I expect a scene something like Michael Spinks against Gerry Cooney.

My Bavarian odds say Haye by some sort of stoppage : 50%. Valuev by decision : 35%. DQ, Technical draw or No Contest : 15%.

For the victor, it will probably be a far, far better win than they have ever won before.

Best case scenario : both men come out throwing like the Dickens.