

London Calling: Homecoming Haye Looks Forward to Ruiz Next

Written by Phil Woolever

Sunday, 08 November 2009 19:00

NURNBERG - It looks like a spring date in London against John Ruiz for David Haye's initial defense of the WBA title.

While the exact time frame involved will depend upon the extent of an injury to Haye's right hand, which he said occurred during the early sessions of his lacklustre but lucrative victory over Nikolai Valuev, all the primary players present at a post-fight press conference verified that Haye-Ruiz was a "go."

When I heard that Team Ruiz had accepted an agreement to step aside in his position as Valuev's mandatory challenger in order for Valuev-Haye to occur, I figured that for one eventual reason or another the worthy but much-maligned Ruiz would never actually fight the winner.

I've become skeptical about many situations following the fight game, but I'm glad to say that some misconceptions were laid to rest Saturday night at a rowdy Arena Nurnberger.

Haye-Ruiz will probably be an ugly affair, and many fans outside the UK will criticize the pairing, but I believe Ruiz deserves the shot and I hope the event comes off smoothly.

"I'd love to have a homecoming against Ruiz for the British fans at someplace like the O2 Arena," said Haye. "I don't think there will be any problems getting everything agreed on quickly."

As Haye and his team spoke about Ruiz getting his chance early next year and their appreciation for his cooperation, everyone at the dais nodded their heads as if that would indeed be the next slugging step without complications.

Sitting at the back of the room, "The Quiet Man" Ruiz lived up to his nickname without the smallest inclination of getting some of the press conference spotlight for himself and pursed his slightly puffed lips as if determinedly envisioning his next step. I hope his patience is a virtue.

"I didn't see the whole fight," said Ruiz about tonight's result. "It was one of those things where you never know. Valuev was the aggressor but Haye moved better. He did what he had to do, (but) I'm surprised they gave it to him."

Another perception that changed was my feeling about Haye being a low-class loudmouth.

Some real jerks are good at saying "I was just building up the fight" to excuse being a scumbag, but Haye made his promotional skills obvious without making the hollow "build-up" disclaimer or hollow apology. Haye was the first one to stand and applaud when Valuev entered the packed media room, and his demeanor throughout the night made it clear he hoped Valuev

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hadn't taken any insults personally outside the strategic strands.

Also, many fighters cite superficial boo-boos as justification for a crappy performance, and nobody was mistaking Haye's inauguration for a monumental bout. A serious hand injury at this level is usually treated with more immediate extreme care but Haye showed up after the fight with only a couple band-aids worth of tape on his ring finger and pinkie. He handled the microphone or bottled water without difficulty.

Still, we were eye to eye when he answered my questions and I believe he was being honest with a response that noticeably shook the scribbling assembly.

"I knew I'd hurt him in the last round but I didn't try to stop him because I damaged my hand (earlier)," diagnosed Haye. "I knew my hand was broken early in the fight. In the second or third round I hit him on top of the head. He's like hitting a brick wall."

It didn't seem Haye really planned on a knockout anyway.

"We didn't plan on it being the most entertaining fight," said trainer Adam Booth. "The key was to stun him and then be gone. If you land two punches and don't get hit, you win the round."

That pretty much sums up the dull duke out. You could have kept an accurate punchstat with one hand.

Still, just because it was a cruddy battle doesn't mean it wasn't a great scene overall.

Hundreds of loud, mostly unobnoxious Haye fans took command in the full house of around 8,008 spectators. There were Union Jacks in every corner of the rafters, and only a few Union jackasses.

It was enough of a festive environment that fans may not have been able to keep their holidays straight. A large group in Santa outfits sat near balloon carrying Haye backers waving British flags and banners. A guy in an excellent, full Don King costume with sky high hair roamed and roared to ongoing accolades, and a giant Easter Bunny type rabbit suit handed out promos across the arena floor. After a couple of the high octane local beers, anyone who thought they had wandered into Alice's rabbit hole could be forgiven.

The undercard didn't have many two-way, pick 'em thrillers, but there were some exciting blast outs by very solid prospects or fringe contenders like Francisco Palacios, Alexander Frenkel, and high-potential Swiss star Robert Helenius.

Former belt holder Sergey Lyakhovich more than lived up to his comeback hype. He came in, looking quite possibly better than ever, and demolished Jeremy Bates while Haye was still making his way to the dressing room past adoring throngs. If tonight's Lyakhovich and Ruiz squared off, it might have been the off-radar heavyweight fight of the year.

For his part, Ruiz kept his promise of a more aggressive style and kept throwing hard punches

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during a 7th round stoppage of very durable Adnan Serin. The bad news is Ruiz looked like an old fighter, and a nasty cut (probably from unintentional headbutts) indicated a likely scar tissue problem from too much mileage.

From a car wreck perspective, by far the most interesting action occurred after the main event when dozens of determined, drunken blokes clashed with totally outnumbered but even more determined security forces. Some of the ensuing madness was like Keystone Cop capers, but some was serious mayhem.

Through it all, a cooler headed swarm of Brits serenaded Haye as he conducted ringside interviews with some of the many UK news outlets that covered the match as if it were the fight of the decade.

It wasn't. My scorecard had it 118-113 Haye. It was a snoozer for approximately thirty four of the thirty six minutes it played out, but there was plenty of excitement around the bells and the place went justifiably loco when Haye wobbled Valuev to close the show in the 12th.

There was even some uncertain anticipation as the scores were awaited, but something about Golden Boy honcho Richard Schaefer in Haye's corner made it clear the Brit wasn't going to get ripped off.

"Today is the beginning of a new day for boxing," Schaefer said publicly to Haye afterward. "David Haye is at the top of the list of those who can match their skills inside the ring with charisma. People have been waiting for somebody like you to enter the heavyweight division." Some of those people probably inhabit GB promotional offices, which should turn out to be a plus.

Valuev and his corner seemed almost shell-shocked afterward.

"Just one thing went wrong," mused Valuev with some sour grapes. "It was like a marathon, not a fight. I didn't expect him to run that much. The last round made the difference."

Haye laughed alongside Schaefer during King's monologue about the Berlin Wall and Valuev's eventual return. King's mini-speech was amusing to all in many translated languages, and whatever you think of him he did make a good point about honoring armed service veterans.

Haye remained cool and cordial through it all as he basked in the victory.

"If Valuev gets some more good wins under his belt I'd be more than willing to fight him again," offered the victor. "The key tonight was speed. People don't realize I'm very fast. First and foremost is being a good athlete. If I wasn't boxing I'd be playing football or rugby."

"It's a bit surreal to be honest. You try for something all of your life, then you get it. This wasn't just for me, it was for all my family, friends and fans. The only thing I can think about is going partying!"

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The inevitable subject of meeting the Klitschkos came up, and now Haye's previous pull outs against the brothers look like good business sense. Vitali reportedly said he was still more than willing to get it on, and that possible summer contest will probably be the biggest heavyweight fight since Lewis-Tyson.

"I look forward to cleaning up the division," promised Haye. "I want anyone who's got a belt. The Klitschkos are definitely in my sights."

For now, the next likely target is Ruiz, barring something like a huge, immediate guarantee against Wladimir. We'll probably get the official word on Haye-Ruiz by the time Vitali meets Kevin Johnson in December.

What to expect for Haye-Ruiz?

Huge interest in the UK. Global proportions aside, Haye has already brought the mainstream bacon home to London.

Further diplomatic, trans-Atlantic grace from Team Ruiz. His moniker should be "The Quiet and Classy Man."

Long range prediction: If both men show up in the fighting form they displayed last Saturday, Haye wins by a bloody, multiple knockdown TKO within the first half of the fight.

That leads to a rare, multi-national bidding war for a Klitschko fight which ends up in Vegas unless some special commodity like Dubai pulls out all the stops.

For now, let's just hope that part one of the "Haye as Champion saga" plays out as enjoyably as he did in Nurnberg.