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Now that Roy Jones has in all probability been removed as a potential opponent for Bernard Hopkins 50-5-1 (32), the name that's been floated out as Hopkins next opponent lately is newly crowned WBA heavyweight title holder David Haye 23-1 (21).

In his last fight Haye the former WBA/WBC/WBO cruiserweight champ won a lackluster 12-round majority decision over WBA heavyweight champ Nikolay Valuev. Prior to the fight the top ranked contender for Value's title was former champ John Ruiz. Ruiz was paid step aside money to clear the path for Haye to fight Valuev with him remaining the mandatory challenger for the winner. Since the fight there's been a lot of talk suggesting that Haye will probably make his first title defense against Ruiz sometime in 2010.

John Ruiz is a fighter that some fight fans would like to see go away, but the guy is a real grinder and him beating Haye shouldn't be thought of as an upset by anybody. Ruiz is a very dangerous fight for Haye and in all honesty David wasn't anything close to impressive against Valuev. Ruiz fought a better Valuev in 2005 and 2008 and lost two disputed decisions to him. Haye being a little smaller and quicker than Ruiz enabled him to stay away from the ponderous Valuev. Whereas Ruiz was forced to muscle and fight Valuev more and therefore had a tougher time winning rounds convincingly against him.

During his 17 year career the 37 year old Ruiz has fought almost every top heavyweight who's come along during that time. He was only embarrassed in one fight against David Tua and that was more than 13 years ago. Since Tua, only Roy Jones and James Toney have outclassed Ruiz, but that was in part due to their quickness and fighting style. Ruiz is vulnerable to quick handed movers/boxers and also to fighters who can really punch like Tua. David Haye is neither.

Ruiz is much stronger physically and tougher than he gets credit for being. He's the type of fighter who can probably get to Haye psychologically during the fight. And if Haye were to nail him with his Sunday right hand and Ruiz didn't go anywhere, it's not a reach to think Haye could easily come undone and Ruiz would feed off of that as he proceeded to maul as the fight progressed.

With the sudden emergence of Bernard Hopkins being injected into the mix as a possible opponent for Haye, it might not be a bad idea for Haye to find a way out of fighting Ruiz so he can fight Hopkins for more money. Haye would be a solid favorite over Hopkins and Ruiz will be aging on the sideline during the interim. And if Haye has shown us anything over the last six months it's that he's a smart guy and understands the business of boxing.

Remember, he talked himself into a fight with both Wladimir and Vitali Klitschko before pulling out and finagling himself into a title fight against the fighter he had the best chance to beat who held a major title. If Haye were to fight Ruiz and lose he'd be at the back of a long line of contenders in line to fight either one of the Klitschko's. However, a fight with Hopkins would

captivate the public's interest and the risk of losing is significantly less. Being so much bigger and younger than Hopkins would be a great neutralizer for the experience he lacks. And stylistically, Hopkins doesn't throw a lot of punches and Bernard would look to get Haye to beat himself more so than he'd try to go out and take the fight to him; which is a big plus for Haye.

If I were Haye, I'd try to find away out of fighting Ruiz next and would push to fight Bernard Hopkins instead. If Haye beats Hopkins he'll enhance his name recognition and remain in line to fight Ruiz or one of the Klitschko's in a subsequent fight. And there's a good chance he could be stopped by Ruiz in a loss compared to losing by decision to Hopkins if he were to lose to him.

David Haye fully grasp that he's not a fighter who's going to build a hall-of-Fame legacy fighting as a heavyweight circa 2010 and beyond. So his best move would be to try and extend his tenure as WBA heavyweight champ into as many significant pay days as he can - and that starts with fighting Bernard Hopkins. And if he beat Hopkins he'd make a lot more fighting either Klitschko in his next fight opposed to him coming off a victory over Ruiz, which is certainly not a given.

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