

HAYE, WHADYVA SAY? Hope Returns To The Heavyweight Division

Written by Ron Borges

Saturday, 03 April 2010 17:00

MANCHESTER, ENGLAND – Heavyweight boxing found what it has been searching for at the MEN Arena Saturday night. It found a reason to hope.

WBA title holder David Haye came to the jam-packed building with over 20,000 strong cheering his name and delivered on a promise to revitalize the long dormant division not simply by doing what four of the past British heavyweight champions could not – which was to successfully defend their title for the first time – but by doing it in the kind of concussive fashion that causes fans to clamor to see more.

In recent years that has seldom been the case with a heavyweight belt holder. Every time a new one emerged the more we saw of him, the less we liked him. In the post-Lennox Lewis Era it didn't matter if it was Wladimir Klitschko or his brother, Vitali, or Nikolai Valuev or Ruslan Chagaev or Oleg Maskaev or Hasim Rahman or John Ruiz or anyone else you can name. Every time one of them fought we wanted to see the other under the theory he had to be better. And he was...until he was in the ring and fighting, then we couldn't stand the sight of him either and convinced ourselves whichever one wasn't fighting had to be better than the one who was.

Saturday night Haye proved to be the opposite of all that disappointment, knocking Ruiz down four times, including twice in the opening round, on his way to a scintillating 9th round TKO that instantly made him the hottest property in the division simply because he won in a way worthy of a heavyweight champion.

Even after those first two knockdowns, Haye's performance wasn't flawless. He was hurt himself late in the round and later sustained a small nick along the side of his right eye and further bruising, both situations developing because he spent more time exchanging with Ruiz than was either wise or necessary considering his distinctly superior quickness and hand speed.

But he floored Ruiz again in the fifth and sixth rounds, before hurting him for the last time in the ninth significantly enough that Ruiz's corner finally did what they had been debating for the previous two rounds. They signaled referee Guillermo Perez that the 38-year-old, two-time WBA champion's quest for a third title reign was over.

As Perez signaled an end to the fight as well as probably Ruiz's career, he turned the flood lights on Haye, the former undisputed cruiserweight champion who was fighting as a heavyweight for only the fourth time in his career.

In the week leading up to the fight, Haye made clear his goal was not simply to win but to "make a statement, to do something distinctive." He did and that process began midway through Round 1, when he stunned Ruiz with a hard left jab, sending him into a squat for an instant that left him directly in front of the champion.

Haye (24-1, 22 KO) wasted no time whatsoever launching a straight right hand behind that jab,

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slamming it into the middle of Ruiz's face and sending him tumbling onto his back. When he got up at the count of six, Ruiz's nose was bloodied and his eyes glassy and soon enough he was down on the deck a second time from a punch Perez would rule had hit Ruiz illegally in the back of the head.

Although Perez allowed the knockdown he then deducted a point from Haye. It was a decision that made no sense but also one that didn't matter much in the end because soon enough Ruiz would be rendered half senseless himself before the bombardment concluded at 2:01 of Round 9.

With that resounding ending, it lifted Haye into the public's consciousness and set up what is likely a rematch with Valuev, who owns a rematch clause, and then a fight in America against someone like Cristobal Arreloa. Neither is a fight the world is demanding but the first is a contractual obligation he will likely be forced to fulfill and the second a way to introduce him to the American fight fan in a way that they can measure his performance against that of Vitali Klitschko, who took an awful long time to get rid of a guy who can't spell boxing, let alone do it.

Because there was no United States TV of Haye's stoppage of Ruiz, American fight fans will only be exposed to a brief highlight or two and stories of how things went. That allows for the myth-making machine of unvarnished publicity to go into effect, hoping to create a demand for unification fights with the brothers Klitschko that will become the biggest heavyweight fights since the retirement of Lennox Lewis. That is exactly the result Haye was looking for and he wasted no time getting to it.

"The first round I wasn't trying to knock him out but openings were there and I went for them and landed," Haye said. "I had full respect for John Ruiz. I knew he was tough, durable guy. I knew he'd keep coming.

"I enjoyed the fight because he kept coming forward, coming forward. He just kept coming. I knew it was going to be tough. Every time I envisioned the fight it was tough so when it happened I was ready for it. I might not have been five years ago."

The more Ruiz (44-9-1, 30 KO) got up, dusted himself off and continued to wade in on Haye, the more the champion could see the cumulative effects of the punishment he was dishing out.

Ruiz may have been hard-headed enough to avoid a knockout but there was nothing he could do about the punishment he was taking except accept it until it finally overwhelmed his resolve.

"I could see his energy getting lower and lower," said Haye. "The effects I was having were great. I could feel it. I could see it in his eyes. He kept coming but I could see he wasn't enjoying it."

Who would have?

By the time the bout was stopped Ruiz had been down four times, both his eyes were swollen and discolored and his nose was bleeding and taking an unexpected left turn in the middle of

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his face. It was the kind of domination we have not seen in the division for quite some time. The kind that gets people talking, which we also haven't seen in the division for quite some time, either.

"It felt like the crowd really enjoyed it," Haye said. "It was absolutely electric. It felt exciting."

To Ruiz, it felt like he'd suddenly grown old beyond his 38 years, a sad fact his trainer Miguel Diaz acknowledged from the perspective of a man who has spent all his adult life around boxing and witnessed this kind of moment before.

"The first round took him completely out of it," Diaz said. "He got old tonight."

Haye contributed to speeding up the aging process with sizzling rights and a steady jab that set them up. In the doing, he took himself to the top of the list of opponents for the Klitschko brothers, or at least he should have.

Boxing being what it is, he'll be saddled first with a mandatory rematch with Valuev and probably at least one more fight after that to further build up enthusiasm for a unification fight with one of the Klitschkos but the fact of the matter is David Haye will never be more ready than he is right now to challenge them or a hotter commodity in the public's easily jaundiced eye.

Haye knows it. Boxing promoters know it. All of boxing knows it. That it's unlikely to happen immediately is typical but if he can put together another performance like the one against Ruiz it would cement the idea that he is more than a good looking guy with a great physique, glib tongue and big right hand.

It would convince people that for the first time in years, there's somebody worth paying attention to in the heavyweight division both because of his punching power and the element of doom that surrounds him because of remaining doubts about the trustworthiness of his chin and overall stamina.

"I want to fight the best but who knows?" Haye said. "I'd love to fight at Wembley (Stadium) and pack the house. My plan is to unify the division. Do I want to fight Valuev again first? Given the option, no. I'd like to fight who the fans want me to fight.

"That's the Klitschkos. Look at their last opponents. Eddie Chambers was in dreadful shape. So was Arreola. They were a disgrace to boxing. If I hit them with the same shots I hit John Ruiz with, they'll go over."

That's what David Haye needs the public to believe so maybe he has to go out and do it first because that is what heavyweight boxing is supposed to be about – concussively conclusive conquests. That's what he achieved Saturday night. When's the last time that really happened?