

David Haye Makes Things Clearer

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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If there were any questions about whether David Haye was a legitimate player in the heavyweight division or about whether he'd made a stupid mistake counting on a sensational win over the dangerous John Ruiz to increase demand for a fight between himself and either Wladimir or Vitali Klitschko, those questions were answered about thirty seconds into round one of Haye's title defense against Ruiz on Saturday.

That's how long it took before Ruiz was on the deck, compliments of a beautiful one-two that caught him squarely. Before the round had ended, he was draped over the ropes and dropped again, this time by a rabbit punch. Referee Guillermo Perez appeared to both credit the knockdown while deducting a point for the foul (Haye later admitted to throwing rabbit punches, apologizing for having done it and chalking it up to "adrenaline.")

And although David Haye didn't get his first round knockout, he did what he'd set out to do: established himself as the hottest property in the heavyweight division. As he put it after the fight, "I'm the most exciting heavyweight in the world. Even against John Ruiz, my fights are exciting."

Does anyone doubt that a unification bout with either Klitschko would bring the fighters buckets of money? Staged in England or Germany, in any size arena, the fights would be immediate sellouts. It'd do huge business in Vegas or at the new Cowboys Stadium too.

At the MEN Arena in Manchester England, Haye defended his WBA heavyweight title over nine mostly one-sided rounds, punching Ruiz nearly at will, and using his legs to effortlessly avoid Ruiz's totally predictable aggression. The difference in the fighters' hand speeds was immediately apparent, and Haye had no difficulty in occasionally quitting his backward movement, planting himself, and delivering lightning quick, jarringly hard shots to Ruiz's head.

Ruiz abandoned the mauling, clinching, wrestling, and grabbing style that has made life so tough for so many heavyweights, replacing it with a double jab that was too slow to get to the retreating Haye. By the seventh round, John was taking a sustained beating. Miguel Diaz, his trainer, thought about stopping the fight at the end of the round and again at the end of the eighth.

He could have done that. Ruiz is starting to look like an old fighter. He's still tough, still well conditioned, and still gives you everything he's got, but against Haye he simply marched forward into gunfire all night. He's been a good representative of the sport for a long time; it would be unfortunate to see him carry on much longer if this fight is the best he can do.

But let's give Haye lots of credit where credit is due. In Ruiz, he knocked out a guy who, aside from one highlight reel exception against David Tua, has gone the distance in each of his losses, all of them to good fighters. He established for anyone who doubted him (myself among them) that he has genuine heavyweight power. Throughout the fight, he showed great intuitive

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sense of where he was in the ring. His legs not only held up, he exhibited terrific balance and movement, proving that the Valuev fight wasn't simply a matter of his moving from necessity; he doesn't only move when he has to, he moves to give himself punching range.

Haye is not without liabilities: He seldom throws body punches. He doesn't put combinations together in order to set up opportunities for himself, instead trusting exclusively in his own one punch power, and potshotting when he sees an opening. He also carries his left dangerously low.

On the other hand, two of the things he's most criticized for didn't turn up against Ruiz. His stamina was fine. Although the British broadcast team made mention of Haye breathing heavily in his corner after the fourth round, whatever fatigue there may have been didn't show itself in the ring. Against a guy notorious for wearing out opponents, Haye was as fresh in the ninth round as in the first. And on the few occasions Ruiz caught him, in the second and fourth rounds, Haye took the punches without wavering. If Ruiz isn't anywhere near the puncher that either Klitschko is, he's solid enough to be able to rock good heavyweights. It may be too soon to give Haye a complete green light in the chin department, but he doesn't crumble at the first sign of disaster. Earlier, he'd mentioned that he wasn't the same guy who'd been stopped by Carl Thompson and dropped by a number of others. Maybe he was telling the truth.

Later on Saturday night Bernard Hopkins beat Roy Jones in an ugly street fight between two old men, one of them who's very crafty. At one point, before their Saturday fights, I thought it would be a smart move for Hopkins to challenge Haye. Bernard would have no chance to beat him, he doesn't need the money; and he'd get knocked out trying.

David Haye has energized a division that seems to be going through a minor revitalization. He can bring in mainstream fans. He can talk. He has a marketable look. And he now seems eager to get into the ring for unification bouts. I wouldn't favor him to beat either Klitschko at this point, but I no longer see him as a pure hustler who talked his way into a big money fight.

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