

Nicolay Valuev: At least the Beast from the East

Written by Robert Ecksel

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Nicolay Valuev, 32, is the Russian giant who just decisioned John Ruiz in Berlin to claim The Quietman's WBA heavyweight title. No Ruiz fight is an aesthetic masterpiece, and his fight with Valuev was no different. Before the bout Ruiz said of Valuev, "He's got a head the size of a Volkswagen. I can't miss hitting him." Ruiz was right about one thing, Valuev's head *is* the size of a Volkswagen; unfortunately for Ruiz, so are his fists, and those Volkswagens were hitting back.

The WBA belt that Valuev won – a belt much coveted despite some of the waists it has graced – the same belt Ruiz's former manager, the banshee Norman Stone, grabbed off the new champ's shoulder in a fit of pique – does not fit the new champ; either it's too small or he's too big, take your pick. The heavyweight champion – who is 7 feet tall, weighs 323 pounds, and looks like an illustration in a medical textbook – doesn't want the world to look at him like he's a sideshow freak; Valuev, who wrote poetry before he started fighting, considers himself "a sportsman and not a monster."

It was only a matter of time before a genuine colossus, something that stepped from the pages of ancient myth, something that jogged off an asphalt basketball court, actually won the heavyweight crown. Although there are exceptions to the rule (the hapless Primo Carnera comes to mind), it seems the heavyweights keep getting bigger and bigger year after year after year – from the golden olden days before there were weight classes; through the small heavyweights like Marciano and Patterson; to the big boys like Liston, Ali and Holmes; then to the super sized Foreman, Bowe, Lennox and Klitschkos; and culminating, at long last, in Nicolay Valuev, the biggest, if not necessarily the best, heavyweight champion of the world so far.

Russia's first heavyweight champ is a sight for sore eyes. According to his promoter Don King, "Valuev is the eighth wonder of the world." If beating John Ruiz by dubious decision in Germany makes one the eighth wonder of the world, I've got to get my wonders checked. But there's a new heavyweight champ in town, a guy who calls himself, albeit with a Russian accent, the baddest man on the planet, and tough guys weighing a duce and up are talking trash and thinking big bucks.

Some wild-eyed optimists insist that Valuev fight Wladimir Klitschko. Hmmm. Good fight. Not gonna happen. Lamon Brewster? Hasim Rahman? Not yet. It's too early. Maybe down the road. Valuev fighting Byrd is a possibility, but they'd have to *pay* fans to watch that fight – and the fans would still scream bloody murder. Andrew Golota, last seen crawling on a canvas in Chicago, might be good feed for the Beast from the East, and word from out west is the Foul Pole is interested. King can play the Slav vs. Slav angle to the hilt and sell the fight to New Europe as the greatest thing to hit it since the Second Coming. (Only in Hungary!)

Evander Holyfield, who has been inactive the past year, and long may it last, is another fighter who would like nothing better than to get his hands on Valuev, just so long as it's not in New

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York State. The 43-year-old former undisputed world heavyweight champion figures he's fried bigger fish than Valuev and is undaunted by the challenges the Russian presents.

"I'm hoping that I get the opportunity to fight him. It would be a good show," Holyfield told BBC Radio Five Live. "The art of the game of boxing is not so much the size but what you can do with what God's given you. You can be big, but if you can't fight, you don't have the punch, or don't have the skills that are necessary, then you're just another fighter. It's obvious that he'll get tired if you move a lot. I should have faster hands so I should be able to dot in and dot out and hit him with a lot of punches.

"He could throw one hard shot and that could be it – but you've got to not let him hit you and you've got to hit him."

Evander talks a good fight, but his body, in a last-ditch effort at a semblance of self-preservation, has other ideas. But no matter who Valuev fights next, champ, contender, chump, pretender, the new king is a hot property, and if he's not too spooky for American tastes, not too much like Lurch in "The Addams Family" for the red states to cotton up to, Nicky Boy will be doing the talk shows in a minute.

All hail the newest heavyweight champion of the world! Ruiz is gone (but not forgotten), Valuev has arrived (but is untested), I have seen the future and it's as I feared.

Boxing may keep shooting itself in the foot, but, in the game's defense, at least it's firing back.