

Boxing, Valuev, Holyfield All Lose

Written by Ron Borges

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Evander Holyfield was right. So were the people who said he can't fight any more.

Holyfield insisted for weeks that he could win the WBA heavyweight title from 7-foot, 310-pound Nikolay Valuev. He was correct. He could have had he not had to go to Switzerland to try and win it away from a German promoter named Wilfred Sauerland, who unfortunately for Holyfield controls both Valuev and the Swiss Boxing Commission.

But do not get your blood pressure elevated because the rest of the boxing world was right too when it insisted almost to a person that Holyfield no longer belonged inside a boxing ring. Holyfield proved that by plodding through 12 embarrassing rounds, most of them spent bouncing up and down while staying several arms lengths away from Valuev. It figures this fight was staged in Switzerland. Didn't they sit out World War II? Valuev and Holyfield did the same thing Saturday night.

War this was not, as Holyfield spent the evening circling and moving and slipping and sliding away from the clutches of a Russian giant who has no more idea how to fight than Sequatchie does but otherwise has quite a bit in common with him.

When it was mercifully over Saturday night, Holyfield had won back the WBA version of the heavyweight title without having to for one moment engage in a fight, which was a good thing because the few times one threatened to break out he did not look good in the exchanges.

Boxing being boxing however, two of the three judges inside sold out Hallenstadion in Zurich, Switzerland (not much must be happening there on a Saturday night) thought Nikolay Valuev had done enough to retain the WBA title and so awarded it to him, one by a ridiculous score of 116-110 in a fight Holyfield won by no less a margin than 117-111. That margin existed, just to keep the record straight, only because Valuev fought like a man on Quaaludes.

The Swiss judge scored it 115-114 for Valuev as well, meaning while his Italian counterpart committed a felony his scorecard was only petty theft by comparison.

The one card that made some sense was that of Panamanian judge Guillermo Perez, who scored it a draw, 114-114. Although I had Holyfield winning 117-111 it is easy to see how one could come up with a draw because since neither guy wanted to fight why give either of them a round?

The 46-year-old Holyfield was trying to become the oldest man to ever win any portion of the fractured heavyweight title. Although he will never be credited with it he did enough to win. Since Valuev did nothing that was a pretty low standard.

"I thought I hit him more times than he hit me," Holyfield said a smirk of resignation on his tired face. "I felt I did what was necessary to win."

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He did. He got to Zurich safely.

That's really all it took because Valuev was so much worse than atrocious words fail me. Valuev has twice won the WBA title, a fact that proves miracles do come true. He spent his entire night in Zurich following Holyfield around the ring like that guy in those old comic skits whose hat was tied to a string and every time he bent down to pick it up off the ground it moved away from him.

Later Valuev (51-1) would say with a straight face, "He made me work very hard to win. Holyfield was unbelievable with his speed."

There are many words one can associate with Holyfield these days. Insane would be one. Shot would be another. Speed would not come into the equation unless he was driving one of his 20 sports cars around Atlanta.

Speed? What does the word mean in Russina? Slow of hand and slower of foot?

Holyfield lumbered around so badly it gave the word lumbering a bad name. Then again, compared to Valuev, he looked like Willie Pep, even though he fought like Willie Pepless.

If ever one wanted to make a case for the death of boxing all they'd have to do is sit people in a room for an hour and condemn them to watch a tape of what went on in Zurich Saturday night. By the time that tape was done running, MMA would have a new legion of fans because it was an advertisement for any form of entertainment not called boxing.

This was a fight that, as predicted, did nothing for anyone involved. It did not elevate Holyfield (42-10-1) even though he deserved to get the decision and it didn't do anything for the long-suspect Valuev but confirm everyone's worst fears – which is that he is a sad, freakish circus act who cannot spell fight let alone engage in one.

As for the heavyweight division, it was just another in what now seems an endless string of reasons to ignore the weight class that once ruled the sport. If Nikolay Valuev is a heavyweight champion of anything the title is meaningless. If there is a place inside a boxing ring these days for Holyfield, who was once one of the sport's shining stars, it is in a tuxedo being introduced as a celebrity in attendance and nothing more.

In the end there is only one thing that can be said about the engagement that was Nikolay Valuev vs. Evander Holyfield – thank God it's over.