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Povetkin holding his new belt aloft. You'll notice ancient Evander next to the victor. If public sentiment isn't too horrid, we'll likely see Povetkin offer Holyfield a crack at the title.

ERFURT, THURINGIA - Blood, guts, big whaps and bigger balls. Welcome to Messehalle Erfurt last Saturday evening.

Let it be noted in even the most cynical duke out documents that for one rare night in the current era of top flight European heavyweight boxing, there were brutal brawls between highly skilled participants who let it all hang out.

Alexander Povetkin outfought Ruslan Chagaev in an entertaining waltz. Robert Helenius slammed persistently courageous Sergei Liakhovich in a bloody barnburner. Expectations for previously elusive fireworks amongst top heavyweights were finally met and surpassed. Povetkin - Chagaev featured some excellent give and take and got people on their feet. Helenius - Liakhovich featured Liakhovich taking an amazing amount, and giving back some too. After the frustrating fizzle of Klitschko - Haye, it's too bad the Erfurt bouts weren't more widely viewed. It's an insignifigant point among serious Hurricane Irene considerations, but the contests probably would have played great on Times Square, though Liakhovich's battered bravery might not have provided optimal PR for the game along Broadway.

Wladimir is a class act and Hall of Fame professional, but if he had Helenius's finishing

mindset, Klitschko might be more popular than Manny Pacquiao. In terms of effort and work ethic, too bad Liakhovich couldn't swap paychecks with the Big Toe.

Povetkin had scattered Russian cheering sections ringside by the dozen that made for an interesting international environment. The battle with Chagaev wouldn't classify as a true slugfest, but there was plenty of competent conking from both sides. The fight could stand as a respectable top 10 heavyweight contender clash in any of the "better eras".

For a while in the middle rounds it appeared the still powerful Chagaev would expose Povetkin as an overhyped Olympian. When Povetkin proved his premiere punching pedigree there was a real buzz in the crowded arena with around 4,555 patrons.

Any missing drama was delivered when trainer Teddy Atlas gave Povetkin the "you can do it for your (deceased)-father" prompt as the bout was slipping away. Atlas told German TV he was waiting for the proper time to employ that motivation. There were no US fighters on the card, but Atlas established an American presence, and Povetkin saved his fight when he used "US style" combinations inside.

Chagaev's body language said it all at the final bell as he shook his head and slumped in frustration.

"He was the better man and deserved to win," acknowledged Chagaev. "It wasn't my night but I'm still disappointed."

"This was a very tough fight," said Povetkin. "I wanted to win because my father wanted me to win."

Seeing the basically unmarked Povetkin strolling along elegant Erfurt avenues with his lady the next morning, it looked more like he had been on vacation than in a rocking ring around 10 hours earlier. Povetkin may indeed continue the holiday mode if gossip regarding an optional November defense of his artificial title against Evander Holyfield in Zurich proves accurate. Holyfield was a highly visible and highly esteemed presence throughout the successful Sauerland Event promotion.

The cynics will howl, but Povetkin-Holyfield will be a very hot ticket in Switzerland. Anyone who complains probably hasn't been there.

Scheduling Helenius - Liakhovich after the main event turned out to be a great move as the co-feature stole the show, between Helenius's offense and Liakhovich's absorbing it. One-sided as the contest concluded, it was no easy win for the "Nordic Nightmare". Helenius had his hands full, and Liakhovich showed the kind of inside punching that troubles Helenius.

Anyone who's had their nose broken with a padded glove has an idea of the pain Liakhovich felt in round two. Anybody who's been punched again and again by a large professional boxer like Helenius on said nose for six more rounds is either named Liakhovich or few and far between.

Watching "The White Wolf" get painted red, and especially the finishing uppercut, one couldn't help but hear Mike Tyson's old "nose into the brain" quote. Still, Liakhovich kept himself in the fight with counter combinations and earned the dubiously punishing honor of carrying on a fruitless struggle.

Not fruitless at all in defining individual fortitude and frantic fan appreciation.

Helenius solidified his highly ranked contender status, right after Povetkin. If Tyson Fury still needs an opponent for Belfast in three weeks, Helenius seems like the type to accept a decent offer. Chagaev and Liakhovich earned what should be mandatory gatekeeper status for the top ten, especially if Haye starts squawking about another big fight.

Helenius will be mentioned more an more as a potential Klitschko opponent, and he will draw pretty well when the time, probably next summer, comes, but Liakhovich showed there is still defensive work to be done.

All four heavyweights gave the types of effort it will take to for the division to recover from self-inflicted promotional and participatory wounds.

Inspiring brutality. Only in a scene like boxing. A scene like Erfurt.

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