

DAVID

THE GIANT SLAYER

Haye Beats Valuev And Invigorates The Heavyweight Division

A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall ... As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground. So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

—1 Samuel 17

By Brian Doogan

Nursing a suspected broken right hand—the reason, he explained, for the paucity of punches thrown in a fight which might have been won in more spectacular fashion with a sling

Surrounded by cameras and disappointed Valuev fans, Haye celebrates winning the WBA heavyweight belt in Nuremberg, Germany. There were plenty of people who felt Haye was too small to beat the 7-foot Russian, but he fought a smart fight and emerged victorious.

PHOTO BY BORIS STREIBEL/GETTY IMAGES

and a stone instead—David Haye walked into the shop at a London gas station. He had been mobbed by supporters, ground crew and baggage staff, snappers, and TV crews on his return to Stansted Airport after flying home from Germany on a low-cost budget airline, but stopping off to buy some newspapers would be a more mundane exercise, he anticipated.

The shop was empty, the headlines—on the front pages as well as the back—were eulogies to his victory over Nicolay Valuev and, alone and unnoticed, he smiled broadly, relaxed and self-satisfied. But he was not alone for long. Not more than a minute had elapsed before people were stepping in off the street to congratulate Britain's new WBA heavyweight titleholder. He posed for pictures on their cell phones and signed autographs until, almost half an hour later, he was allowed to leave, cheered all the way by the elated onlookers as he made his way to his car.

Such will be the life of the giant slayer, a Bermondsey (south London) boy who was brought up in a council flat, but now stands on the threshold of a share in a \$120-million fortune and a fight that could reignite heavyweight boxing.

Richard Schaefer, the CEO of Golden Boy Promotions, revealed that one of the major Las Vegas resorts and hotels is ready to stake this sum to stage a bout between 29-year-old Haye and either of the Klitschko brothers—WBC titleholder Vitali, 38, or 33-year-old Wladimir, who holds THE RING belt along with the WBO and IBF trinkets.

"This is the kind of event which is not a boxing event, it's a global event," Schaefer told BBC Radio 5 live. "If he comes and fights in the United States against one of the Klitschkos, I have no doubt that the total global receipts could be close to \$120-million for one fight. If I had my choice, however, the perfect place for this fight would be Wembley Stadium. It really is a showdown of global proportions, and American boxing fans will embrace David because of his skills inside the ring but equally important are his skills outside the ring. He is charismatic, he is good-looking, and he is well spoken. He knows how to entertain and that is what we are looking for, not just in the US but also around the world. The world has been waiting for a heavyweight titleholder who cannot just fight but who is charismatic and here he is—his name is David Haye."

Not all of the reactions to Haye's majority points win over the 7-foot Russian Giant were as effusive as the praise that flowed from his US-based promoter. In *The Independent* chief sports writer James Lawton described what he had witnessed as an "insult of a fight, a dreg of the dregs," and he did not stop there: "If you care anything for what the world heavyweight title used to mean, when it was the greatest prize in all of sport and was owned by fighters like Louis and Dempsey, Ali and Frazier and Foreman and yes, Mike Tyson and Lennox Lewis, do not go along with any idea that what happened in Nuremberg was other than just about the absolute nadir of pugilism. Neither must we begin to accept the spurious argument that it is necessary to take the best of today and celebrate it for its own sake. The problem with this is that you are bereft of all values ... How bad was the hype that flowed when Haye's victory was announced? It went beyond reason and, sadly, involved some who are normally entitled to the highest respect."

Frank Warren, Britain's foremost promoter over the past 20 years, was another dissenter. "No-one can tell me Valuev is

a quality heavyweight—he is not even an average heavyweight," Warren insisted. "People talk about Valuev as though he is something special. He is probably one of the worst heavyweights ever seen. Everybody gets carried away. Just because he is a giant of a man doesn't mean he is a good fighter. John Ruiz (Haye's next opponent, mandated by the WBA) was beaten by Roy Jones. It's when you start talking about the Klitschkos that you realize these are totally different fights. These are guys who can box and throw punches, and only then will you see whether Haye can do it at that level."

From the moment he engaged in his first professional bout at cruiserweight against fellow Briton Tony Booth, Haye has aspired to thrive in the highest echelons. His potential persuaded the BBC to sign him to an exclusive 10-fight deal in those embryonic days, and for the silver medalist from the 2001 world amateur championships in Belfast, it was an opportunity to make a convincing quick hit. But the heavyweight division was where he knew he could hit hardest.

"At 6' 3", I'm pretty much the same build as Evander Holyfield, and he won an Olympic medal at light heavyweight and a world title at cruiserweight before moving up to heavyweight," Haye said before his pro baptism on a Sunday afternoon at York Hall, Bethnal Green. "My focus right now is on boxing as a cruiserweight and taking the traditional route, Southern Area title, British title, Commonwealth title, European title, and then a world title, and, ultimately, I want to be number one. If I didn't believe I could be, I wouldn't do this."

The second of three kids born to Deron and Jane, Haye has never been short of confidence. "I was six or seven at the time and I remember everyone saying, 'Have you seen this Tyson? He's the most dangerous man on the planet.' I wanted people to speak about me like that

and soon it was all I wanted to do," he recalled. "I'd tell my teachers when they told me to listen or gave me homework that wasn't relevant to what I was going to do in life. I didn't want anything to fall back on. I thought, *if you put all your eggs in one basket then you ain't going to fail*. It wasn't the smartest plan in the world, but it worked."

Haye won each of his first 10 fights inside of four rounds, but in his next encounter, in September 2004, he fell flat on his face at Wembley Arena against veteran Carl Thompson, a former WBO cruiserweight titleholder, who stopped him in the fifth round. It was the night that changed Haye's career. The south Londoner with the Adonis-like body, who had done some modeling at Abercrombie and Fitch, did not want to be known as a pretty boy any longer.

"I was cutting more and more corners, but still getting results," he acknowledged. "So I looked at Carl Thompson and thought: *He's old. I'm younger. I'm fresher. I'm much more athletic. I can take this guy out*. I had a game plan to break him down slowly because he's a tough customer, but I got out there and heard the roar of the crowd and thought, *I'll knock*

him out quick. It was the wrong mindset and I paid the price. I ran out of steam completely, punched myself out in four rounds. Adam Booth, my coach, saw I was gasping for air and had nothing left. Thompson put me down with a shot that wouldn't normally put me down, and Adam threw the towel in to save me for another day."

Booth, who first met Haye in the old Fitzroy Lodge Amateur Boxing Club, barely half a mile from Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, laid down the law. Talent would not be enough if he were to succeed in his career. He needed to start training properly, applying himself, and focusing on the long road ahead.

"Talented individuals in sporting history have a background of complacency," Booth explained. "They don't have to strive. So the way we deal with that with David is constantly putting stress in front of him."

In November 2007 at the Palais des Sport Marcel Cerdan in Paris, Haye won the world cruiserweight title with a seventh-round stoppage of Jean-Marc Mormeck. A second-round TKO of Wales's Enzo Maccarinelli quickly followed, and Haye set about taking on



Haye claims to have injured his right hand landing high on Valuev's head in the second round. "It was like hitting a brick wall," said Haye.

PHOTO BY ALEX GRIMM/BONGARTS/GETTY IMAGES



For long stretches, Haye concentrated on defense, but then, like a spring uncoiling, he'd lash out with a quick burst of punches and move away again before Valuev could retaliate effectively. It was a well-considered plan that worked perfectly.



Somewhat to his surprise, Haye's triumph created quite a stir back home in England. While some tried to marginalize his victory, the general public was enthralled and mobbed Haye at the airport. He's pictured here at a London press conference, on his throne, flanked by a pair of Union Jacks.

the heavyweights, knocking out American Monte Barrett in the fifth round in November 2008 in London. He was all set to challenge the younger Klitschko, Wladimir, in June 2009, but he pulled out just two weeks before their scheduled encounter, citing a back injury. The whisper went round: Was Haye just all hype?

"Mentally, I've always found it harder to get up for those fights where I'm expected to destroy the guy, so when it comes to grafting hard, you don't really have the drive," he revealed. "When the Klitschko bout fell through that was a major disappointment—I was gutted—but you just have to go and set yourself on the next challenge. When I announced that I would be taking on Valuev, everyone was going, 'Whoa! I don't know about this guy, he's 7', are you sure you can beat him?' I wanted to hit the gym to prove everyone wrong. I need that fear in my belly. I need to think: *Right, if I don't get this right I can come a cropper here.* That's when I'm at my best. I've had that fear for the last few fights.

"I will only pick someone if they give me some sort of fear. For instance, when you watch Valuev you can see

how effective he's been in his fights. He's so big, so strong, and he can't be knocked out. I said things about him like 'He is the ugliest thing I have ever seen. I have watched *Lord of the Rings* and films with strange-looking people, but for a human being to look like him, it's pretty shocking.' I called him 'hairy' and 'smelly' and 'the ugliest person I've ever seen,' but all the time I was training really hard and keeping my eye on the prize. I've always wanted to be the best heavyweight in the world and now I'm one step nearer."

Some observers wondered what Haye could hope to do against a behemoth who, with a sideways glance, could make Shrek cry for his mammy. But for all of his freakish characteristics, the 36-year-old "Beast From The East" has never punched his weight, which was just as well for Haye after Valuev tipped the scales at 316 pounds. Haye weighed a more average 217, so his speed and elusiveness needed to be determining factors inside the Nuremberg Arena, which they were.

Haye circled and Valuev gave chase. Slowly. The giant plodded forward with

menace, but never found his range. His ponderous jab fell short repeatedly and he could not get his right hand off quick enough to hit Haye. No real punch of significance was landed in the first round and, regrettably, this became the story of the fight. Haye's plan was a tactical one. He would stay out of range for long stretches and then stealthily move in to throw an occasional burst before slipping back to the perimeter.

Towards the end of the second round, he landed a right hand high on Valuev's head and moved away. "I hurt my hand when I hit him; I couldn't believe it," Haye said later. "It was like hitting a brick wall. The hand might be broken, but I don't care. I found a way to win and that's all that matters."

It was not Haye's customary style, but it was effective, for Valuev, 50-2 (34), was so limited that his potency was negligible.

Haye, 23-2 (21), used his right hand sparingly, but his speed troubled Valuev. Boxing cleverly, the challenger remained out of harm's way and frustration crept into Valuev's predictable pattern of work. Mostly, the giant hit thin air, and Haye

expended little energy in making him miss. A fast combination of punches drilled into Valuev's head and torso in the seventh, but he countered well. Haye was unimpressed, and he moved in closer in the eighth and landed abundantly on his abundant target. He enjoyed further success in the ninth, and stamina did not appear to be an issue for him. Valuev remained strong, too, but he could not nail Haye or corral him into a corner.

The most notable moment of the night was saved until the final round, when Haye landed a left-right and a follow-up left that had Valuev staggering momentarily, like a man thrown out of a pub after several drinks too many. He managed to gather himself, but the fight and the title were gone.

Still, the final bell might have left Haye with some anxiety about getting a de-

cision in Germany, but his demeanor disguised this well, for the celebrations began immediately.

Juan Manuel Garcia Reyes (Spain) scored the bout 114-114, but Stefano Carozza (Italy) and Tom Miller (US) both scored 116-112 for Haye. The giant, who had come tumbling down to the bottom of the beanstalk, remained almost motionless.

"I got out at Stansted Airport on Sunday and there were people waiting just to see me, people who had driven miles. It was very strange because I wasn't expecting a mob like that at all," Haye admitted two days later. "I've heard it before, 'Your life is going to change,' but I can see what it means now. I've had women coming up, kids, people I would assume were not interested in boxing. A friend of mine is a teacher, and he said the children

were talking about it in the playground, the way we did when Frank Bruno fought Mike Tyson. It seems to have put boxing back on the map in the UK. If Valuev had been 6' 3", I'm sure there wouldn't have been the interest, but I was getting texts saying people were running up and down the streets in Bermondsey and Crystal Palace with Union Jacks going bananas, like England had won the World Cup, which is fantastic.

"Usually, I look for my reports in the boxing section, the last page of the sports coverage but, bosh, there I was on the back page and on the front page too.

"I think what got people interested was that it wasn't a fight in which everybody knew who would win. They knew who they wanted to win because they wanted the British guy to beat the Russian, but they looked at the two of us and genuinely didn't know how I was going to do it. Then I was giving it all the mouth, coming across quite cocky, so they wanted to see how it played out. What attracted them to the fight is what attracted me. I take on the biggest challenges in life. Going from cruiserweight champion to heavyweight champion has only been done by Evander Holyfield, so that interested me, and people wanted to find out how I could possibly beat this guy. I showed them, with skill, athleticism, and determination."

His next challenger, Ruiz, stopped Adnan Serin, a journeyman from Germany, in the seventh round on the undercard. The first Latino to win a heavyweight title dominated without taking risks and forced Serin's corner to throw in the towel with a series of clubbing right hands. Having twice been beaten by Valuev, Ruiz is not expected to pose too much of a problem for Haye.

"I plan to beat up Ruiz next and then move on to the Klitschkos," Haye predicted with typical bravado.

The Ukrainians are big men, too, not as big as Valuev, but significantly more formidable. David ought to bring along his sling before climbing into the ring with either of them—and as many stones as he can carry. ■

Brian Doogan, THE RING's European correspondent, was ringside in Nuremberg for Haye-Valuev.



Vitali Klitschko congratulates his brother Wladimir immediately after Wladimir stopped Ruslan Chagaev to win THE RING heavyweight championship in June 2009. Richard Schaefer, CEO of Golden Boy Promotions, believes a match between Haye and one of the Klitschkos could generate as much as \$120 million.