

Holyfield trounced by Ibragimov in Moscow

MOSCOW (AP) - Evander Holyfield's quest for a fifth heavyweight title ran into a roadblock Saturday: Sultan Ibragimov.

Ibragimov kept his WBO title with a unanimous decision over Holyfield, who turns 45 next week and was trying to become the second-oldest heavyweight champion.

Fighting before a home crowd, Ibragimov improved his record to 22 wins and one draw with a slick, counter-punching display. Holyfield dropped to 42-9 with two draws.

The sparse crowd at Khodynka Arena chanted "Sultan! Sultan!" near the end of the bout, with the fighters embracing at the final bell.

There were no knockdowns in the 12-round bout, which was scored 118-110, 117-111 and 117-111 by the judges.

"It was a great fight. He got the decision and I have to go back to the drawing board," Holyfield said. "He's a left-handed fighter, and moves a lot. I did the best that I could with the style that he had."

Ibragimov, a 32-year-old Russian, will now try and unify a fractured division. The other heavyweight titles are held by Wladimir Klitschko (IBF), Ruslan Chagaev (WBA) and recently declared champion Samuel Peter (WBC).

George Foreman became the oldest heavyweight champ at 45 and 300 days when he knocked out Michael Moorer to win the

WBA and IBF titles in 1994. This was Holyfield's 23rd title bout in a 20-year heavyweight career.

In title fights, he beat James "Buster" Douglas (IBF, WBA and WBC) in 1990, Mike Tyson (WBA) in 1996, Michael Moorer (IBF) in 1997 and John Ruiz (WBA) in 2000.

Holyfield's license to fight in New York was suspended after he was outpointed by Larry Donald in 2004 for his third consecutive defeat.

But he underwent surgery on both shoulders and won four straight fights in 2006-07 in Texas to receive another chance when Chagaev withdrew after contracting hepatitis.

"The most important thing is I showed improvement and adjustment," Holyfield said. "At the time when they did take my license, both my shoulders were injured. Today, they were no problem."

Holyfield needed a knockout as the last round started. But on the odd occasion he trapped Ibragimov on the ropes to throw left and right hooks, the Russian would tie him up in a clinch.

A round earlier, Holyfield slipped as he threw a wild haymaker, the referee ruling no knockdown. Ibragimov stayed out of trouble, dancing in and out to land a jab or two as Holyfield stalked him.

The fight began with both fighters feeling each other out, although Holyfield looked happy to tie up Ibragimov to offset his superior hand speed. It also ap-

peared Holyfield accidentally butted Ibragimov's nose.

In the next round, Holyfield rocked Ibragimov with a heavy right and caught him with a glancing left hook. The fighters exchanged stares and words at the bell.

Holyfield was the early aggressor, looking for any chance to unleash his left hook. But Ibragimov clearly took the third round while

fighting off his back foot. Holyfield continued to track Ibragimov around the ring, trying to land his right but wary of his opponent.

Ibragimov took more initiative in the fifth and landed the cleaner punches, but he still got caught with a straight right, left hook combination. Trainer Jeff Mayweather attended to the Russian's nose after the bell.

Ibragimov's snaking jab allowed him to circle the

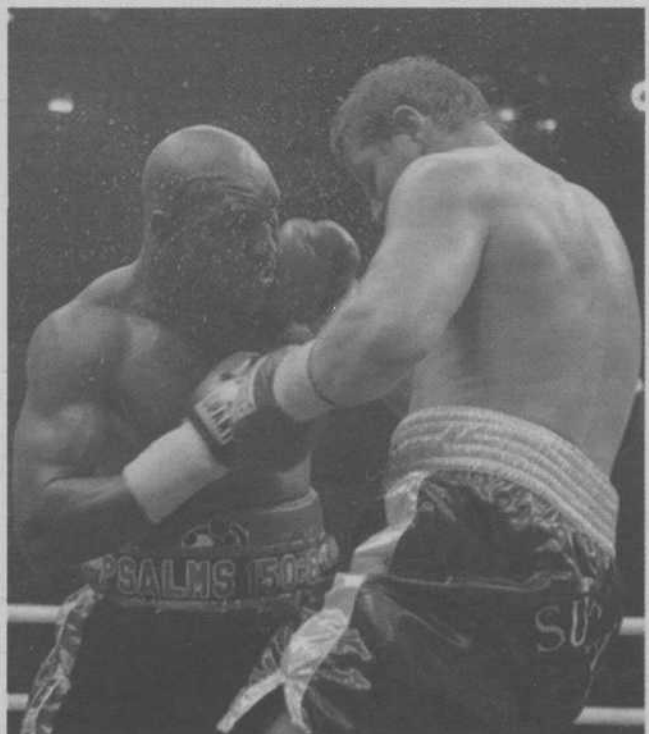
ring, forcing Holyfield to rush and try to get closer. But that only meant his well-regarded chin took a couple of straight lefts.

In the seventh, Holyfield's legs buckled after he caught a punch on the chin. But he came back with a flurry of blows before Ibragimov landed a wild right hook to win the round easily.

Ibragimov's faster hands and feet kept him ahead on the scorecards. But his chin

withstood an overhand right from Holyfield, and his compact, southpaw combinations helped him regain his poise.

A succession of left rips to the body staggered Holyfield in the 10th round and brought the crowd to its feet. Holyfield crumpled as Ibragimov chased him round the ring, snapping a couple of jabs to his face. But Holyfield recovered late in the round to land a left-right-left combination.



Unanimous Decision: Russia's Sultan Ibragimov (right) kept his World Boxing Organization heavyweight championship Saturday in Moscow, ending former champ Evander Holyfield's push for a fifth heavyweight title.

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