

# SPORTS

*Self-Transcendence-Fragrance*

APRIL 2006 \$5

**Meeting the new WBA  
heavyweight champ**

**NYC Marathon winner  
Paul Tergat**



**Challenging  
the Impossible**

**The man who ran  
around the world**

# The view

## NIKOLAI VALUYEV: The new WBA World Heavyweight Boxing Champion

In far-off Malaysia over the Christmas/New Year period 2005/2006, my friends and I pored over the international pages of each English speaking newspaper, trying to bridge the communications gulf and glean some news from our part of the world. December 25th found this writer in Kuantan perusing the sporting pages of the Sunday Star. My attention was suddenly arrested by the following headline: "I'm a poet, not a beast."

The article was about the newly crowned world heavyweight boxing champion Nikolai Valuyev who has been dubbed the "Beast from the East." At 7' 3" (2.20m) tall and 355 pounds (161.3 kg), Valuyev is the tallest and heaviest world champion in the history of the sport. In fact, the championship belt did not fit around his waist and so they had to make him a larger one. Since the fight in mid-December, Valuyev has been fêted as a hero in his native St. Petersburg and he plans to open a Nikolai Valuyev Boxing School there to inspire more young people, particularly street kids and underprivileged children, to take up the sport.

Coincidentally, several days later, BBC World carried an interview with him during which the interviewer would ask a question and then, comically, stretch his arm holding the microphone to its fullest extent in order to be in the general proximity of Valuyev's mouth. I began to wonder what hope his challengers had of ever landing a punch! Even if they were on target, he would only have to pull back to avoid a direct hit. The possibilities were intriguing.

Upon learning of Valuyev's victory in Berlin, Sri Chinmoy immediately wanted to honour the new champion by lifting him overhead. In the past, Sri Chinmoy has lifted a number of outstanding boxers, including the great Muhammad Ali, whom he has met three times, Sugar Ray Leonard, who won titles at five different weights—a feat which has never been duplicated, José Torres from Puerto Rico, Donny Lalonde and Egerton Marcus from Canada, and Saoul Mamby from the USA. It is Sri Chinmoy's own Boxing Hall of Fame, and several of these boxers have become his personal friends.

One might ask what a spiritual Master who embodies peace has in common with such an aggressive sport. On July 30th, 1988, Sri Chinmoy addressed a group of boxers who had come to visit him in New York. He dedicated his talk to Joe Louis, "The Brown Bomber," whom he deeply admired. Sri Chinmoy highlighted the spiritual significance of boxing:

"The determination, dedication and inner and outer strength that you have brought to the fore inspire many others to do the



# from the top

same. Your very presence reminds us that each human being must be a divine warrior, ready to fight against ignorance and imperfections, not only in himself but in the world at large. Your volcano-blows tell the world that humanity can and must challenge ignorance-night."

**S**ri Chinmoy invited Valuyev and his wife Galina to join him in Paris on March 26th to receive the "Lifting Up the World with a Oneness-Heart" award. In a letter to Sri Chinmoy, Valuyev responded: "I am so proud to be honoured together with the greatest boxer of our times, Muhammad Ali, Olympic champion Carl Lewis, Monica Seles, Martina Navratilova, as well as my compatriots, world-class athletes. I value your personal services to mankind as a public figure, a tireless advocate of peace and harmony among people, for your sports and creative activities. Your personal life sets an example and inspires others to perfect themselves, to transcend inner and outer barriers, to serve the needy."

Sri Chinmoy landed in Paris on the morning of the 26th after an overnight flight from New York. His meeting with Valuyev was scheduled for three o'clock at the Palais des Congrès in Montreuil. He had very little time to recover from the flight and prepare for this difficult lift.

Valuyev arrived early, accompanied by his wife, Galina. The large congress hall, full to capacity, lapsed into an awed silence as he walked to the front of the room. Everyone has seen tall human beings, larger than life human beings—but Valuyev is in another class altogether. He is a Goliath among men.

Within a few minutes, Sri Chinmoy arrived and immediately went to greet Valuyev. When they stood together, Sri Chinmoy's head reached at best Valuyev's lower rib cage. It seemed almost inconceivable that it was to be the 74-year old member of this duo who would do the heavy lifting and not the reverse!

Sri Chinmoy began warming up with increasing weights on his lifting machine. At JFK airport in New York, Air France had balked at transporting the various boxes of lifting equipment—and there had been some anxious moments, indeed, wondering whether each crucial piece would make the

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## Sri Chinmoy's Boxing Hall of Fame



Muhammad Ali

Donny Lalonde

Saoul Mamby

Egerton Marcus

José Torres

Sugar Ray Leonard

Top: Mohammad Ali (3-time World Heavyweight Champion, Olympic Gold Medallist) and Sri Chinmoy meditate in 1977. Hours later Ali won his match against Earnie Shavers; Ali and his wife, Loni, are lifted. Middle: Donny Lalonde (WBA Light Heavyweight Champion); Saoul Mamby (World Welterweight Champion); Egerton Marcus (middleweight Olympic Silver Medallist). Bottom: José Torres (World Light Heavyweight Champion, Olympic Silver Medallist); Sugar Ray Leonard (WBC World Welterweight Champion, WBA Light Middle-weight Champion, Olympic Gold Medallist).

flight. But, fortunately, everything arrived safely and was now assembled.

Sri Chinmoy warmed up to 600 pounds, lifting with both arms simultaneously, and then invited his students to come and perform the song he had written for the world champion. The words run:

Nikolai Valuyev, Nikolai Valuyev, Nikolai!  
 Boxer supreme, boxing world's highest sky.  
 Nikolai Valuyev, Nikolai Valuyev, Nikolai!  
 Piercing blows and shattering punches  
     From your fists fly.  
 You are kindness, you are concern,  
     You are compassion.  
 With your oneness-heart,  
 All hearts you have won.

Valuyev, who had stood up for the song, was visibly moved by these beautiful words. In private, he also writes poetry and songs, and recently he wrote a song for his four year old son, Grisha, so it seemed that he was able to identify wholeheartedly with this aspect of Sri Chinmoy's tribute to him.

Sri Chinmoy then invited Valuyev to ascend the platform. Valuyev crossed himself before mounting the stairs. A devout Russian Orthodox Christian, he had sought the blessings of a priest before his title fight last December. He explained in an interview, "The Russian Orthodox Church has the same attitude to boxers as to soldiers. Soldiers kill each other in the battlefield, while we come out to the boxing ring and fight."

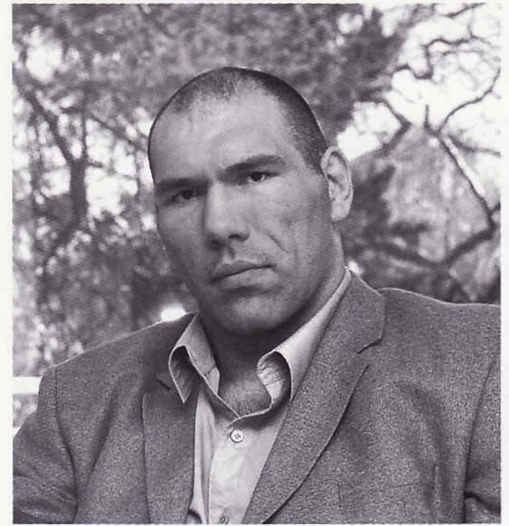
Finally, Valuyev stood on top of the platform. Sri Chinmoy was seated below, meditating in silence before his lift. Valuyev's weight on the day was 355 pounds which, combined with the lifting platform (65 lbs.) gave a total of 420 pounds. Physically, the champion was clearly at the peak of his form. He had been scheduled to defend his title in Berlin on April 1st, but the fight is now postponed for several weeks.

Sri Chinmoy began to exert his full strength and the platform rose several inches. He held the lift suspended while the photographers jockeyed to catch this difficult vertical shot. He then released his upward push and the platform thudded back to its base. After Valuyev had descended the stairs, Sri Chinmoy offered him the special medallion for "Lifting Up the World with a Oneness-Heart," together with a plaque expressing his gratitude to the champ.

Sri Chinmoy then turned to reach for another gift. At the same moment, Valuyev beckoned his wife to bring his gift for Sri Chinmoy. Sri Chinmoy presented Valuyev with a pair of red boxing gloves, and Valuyev in turn presented Sri Chinmoy with a pair of his own blue Everlast boxing gloves!

Another surprise lay in store for Valuyev. Sri Chinmoy proposed to lift him and his wife together! The total for this new lift came to 535 pounds—and Sri Chinmoy once more succeeded on his first attempt. It was more than three times his own bodyweight. In addition, the nature of Sri Chinmoy's style of lifting is such that he uses arm strength alone, without any additional help from his legs

Through a translator, Valuyev expressed his profound appreciation of this signal honour: "I am so grateful, dear Sri Chinmoy and all of you, for your appreciation of my modest merits. I could not even imagine that my modest contributions



will be appreciated so highly. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to you, Sri Chinmoy, for having invited us here and that I have come to know such a wonderful man like you, Sri Chinmoy. I have read some books of yours and seen some videos and I was very deeply impressed. I was impressed with what you do and what you devote your efforts to in your life. The good that you carry to people is so valuable in the world today because humanity needs the good, specially today. I want to express the hope that all your efforts and the continuation of all your actions find fulfilment. As I see, you have many admirers here and I want them to carry your message throughout the world. I am full of gratitude to you."

Sri Chinmoy had brought with him from New York a special message from the great Puerto Rican boxer José 'Chegüí' Torres. Torres, now aged 70, was formerly the world light heavyweight champion and the silver medallist at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. He first met Sri Chinmoy in 1988 (at which time Sri Chinmoy had just begun lifting his "Lifting Up the World with a Oneness-Heart" programme) and he has remained a close friend since then. Nowadays, Torres does the Spanish boxing commentaries on ESPN television.

He had watched Valuyev's title fight in December with great interest and when he learnt that Sri Chinmoy was to lift him, he sent Valuyev the following encouraging and powerful message: "Dear Nikolai, you have one quality that helps a lot, and that is you are big and strong. If you learn to apply that, you will be invincible. You look to me like you are also a smart individual. Boxers always succeed by their intelligence. You are big and strong, which is a great quality—and I think you are also smart. If you can employ your strength, you will be invincible."

Valuyev spent some time going over the message carefully with his translator, especially the Russian meaning of the word "invincible"!

The next morning, before returning to Berlin, Valuyev told one of Sri Chinmoy's Swiss students, "I am feeling the peace of the soul." "You mean, you feel peaceful?" asked his wife. "No," responded Valuyev, "this is something else. It is the peace of the soul."

It occurred to me when I heard this experience of Valuyev's that perhaps he had just discovered the final ingredient to make him truly invincible in the ring.