

**On Defeating a Stronger
Opponent**

October 2011



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David Rubens Associates is a specialist corporate security consultancy offering strategic security services to individuals and organisations across the world.

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On Defeating a Stronger Opponent



The issues of how a weaker combatant can defeat a stronger opponent have been at the centre of strategic thinking across the centuries. Whether it was Sun Tsu, Musashi Miyamoto, Clausewitz, Mao TseTung or Angelo Dundee (Muhammad Ali's great trainer /strategist), the ability to overcome all of the natural advantages held by a stronger enemy has been the ultimate test of the validity of strategic models. All of this was brought to mind by the recent defeat of David Hayes - or rather, his inability to neutralise the advantages of a stronger opponent, Wladimir Klitschko, in order to bring about his own victory.

The advantage that greater power gives you in boxing can be gauged by the fact that weight divisions are divided into roughly 3 Kilo categories, and any fighter would be wary of accepting a fight against someone significantly heavier than himself. As well as the considerable weight difference between Hayes and Klitschko (98Kgs - 111Kgs), with Hayes being 6'3" tall and with a reach 78", his ability to defeat Klitschko's height advantage (6'6") and greater reach (81"), would depend on two things: firstly to avoid being overcome by Klitschko's greater power, and secondly to find a way of going in past Klitschko's defensive (and extremely effective) jab, in order to get close enough to launch a genuinely dangerous attack.

This is the classical strategic stand-off. Any confrontation is a balance of two opposing fight plans: either you use longer reach to stay out of the range of your opponents weapons, and then launch attacks from safe distance (as in helicopter gunships, for example, or a kicker against a puncher in karate), or if you have the smaller reach then you must use speed, cunning and agility to get inside your opponents fighting range, and fight from in close.

This was the decisive tactic that was used by Francis Drake against the Spanish Armada in 1588, when he realised that the design of the Spanish ships, significantly bigger and with more fire power than the English ships, meant that they were less maneuverable, but decisively, would not be able to bring their guns to bear on the English ships if they got in close.

The problem with this simple tenet of battle, of course, is that in passing into your opponents space, you also put yourself in greatest danger, as there will be a stage where the opponent will have the capability of using their weapons and strengths to inflict damage on you, whilst you will not be able to bring your weapons to bear on them. In this case, both sides have different priorities. The stronger opponent will try and incrementally hurt the weaker opponent, punishing him each time he approaches so that gradually both his physical power and his desire to engage will be drained. At the same time, the weaker partner will be ensuring that he avoids taking too much damage, in order to protect his strength to use in a series of decisive attacks, each one designed to inflict serious damage on the opponent, thus making each consequent attack easier (and safer) to deliver.

Clausewitz himself said *'[A] maxim which should take first place among all causes of victory in the modern art of war is: "Pursue one great decisive aim with force and determination." If we follow this and fail, the danger will be even greater, it is true. But to increase caution at the expense of the final goal is no military art [and] is contrary to the nature of war. For great aims we must dare great things'*.

Following his defeat, the general opinion was that Hayes had 'not turned up for the fight', in other words he had talked well in the run-up, but couldn't deliver on the night. I actually thought that this was a wrong reading of the fight. In fact, he was defeated by a better tactician, in that Klitschko came with the intention not of winning, but of avoiding losing (which is exactly the correct tactics to use in his situation). The fact that he failed to seriously hurt Hayes across the 12 rounds, and hardly threw a serious punch, meant that he stuck to his game plan of using his jab to stop Hayes getting in close - as can be seen by the fact that Klitschko landed 134 punches of which 105 were jabs, and Hays averaged 24 total punches thrown per round - half the average for a heavyweight fight.

Sun Tsu said that the secret to fighting a stronger opponent was to ensure that you did not suffer small defeats (the loss of ten fighters to a small revolutionary group is greater than the loss of one thousand soldiers to a government), and to understand that the government would be happy to engage as long as it was on the outskirts of their territory,. As the weaker combatant, you must be ready for when the opportunity arises, which will allow you to make one decisive strike deep into the heart of the enemy.

Klitschko's advisers had obviously read their classical strategists, and in keeping Hayes at distance, without offering him the opportunity to create even one decisive attack, ensured that their fighter prevailed without ever being in danger of defeat.

The masters I mentioned at the start of this column would have been toasting him that night.



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