

A WORKABLE VERSION OF OPEN SCORING

Written by Charles Jay
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I'm a little different than most people. Actually, I do indeed favor a form of open scoring - at least a version that I can live with - though it's certainly in modified form. And it's out of an observation made strictly from the perspective of the participant.

I believe that only the fighters' corners should be given the scores at the end of each round.

My reasoning is simple: I think when we are talking about something that can affect a fighter's career and his livelihood, he should never have to be penalized in those instances of poor scoring on the part of ringside officials.

Easy examples - let's say Lennox Lewis thinks he is ahead by four or five points - and has every reason to believe as much - going into the last round of his fight with Evander Holyfield. On that basis, because he doesn't want to take any unnecessary risks, he decides to coast through the 12th and plays it "safety first". That's understandable, given the circumstances. So he gives up the round to Holyfield, who wins the 12th simply on the basis of being more active. Well, when the decision comes down, Lewis finds out that he was wrong; that Holyfield was actually ahead on two scorecards, and that coasting in the final round has led to defeat.

No fighter deserves to go through that, because it isn't their fault. Fighters put a lot of time and sweat into the process, and so do their people. And if an unjust situation like this can be avoided, it should be. Fighters are entitled to know where they stand as a fight progresses; surprises due to ineptitude in judging should not be a part of the formula they have to deal with.

I would be in favor of the corners being apprised of the scores after each round. They can then make the decision as to whether to pass this information on to the fighter. Basically they will do whatever it is they feel will be appropriate. They may do nothing with the information. But at least they will have it at their disposal.

I went on a radio show once and introduced this idea to a fellow panelist, who is currently a boxing manager and trainer. He told me what he thought were a few problems with it. And I'll pass them on to you, along with my response:

1) THAT THERE WOULD BE ARGUMENTS BETWEEN ROUNDS IF A CORNER DISAGREED WITH THE SCORING. No doubt there will be times when a corner will disagree with the way a round is scored. And some of the more animated cornermen might endeavor to argue with somebody over it. But really, the way to curtail this is the same way you would deal with a coach in the NBA who argued too strenuously about a call. The commission decides to take charge and assess a "technical". In this case, the technical would result in taking points away from the fighter. And if it persists, the cornerman could be sent back to the dressing room. You'd see very few "incidents" this way.

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2) THAT IN DISTANCE FIGHTS, THE CROWD WOULD SEE ONE CORNER CELEBRATING, AND THAT WOULD TAKE AWAY THE "DRAMA" WE REFERRED TO IN OUR LAST INSTALLMENT. Yes, maybe so, although sometimes the crowd might not pick it up. Perhaps there could be adjustments made, where the scores are given until the eighth round of a ten-round fight, or the tenth round of a title fight, so there still is an element of suspense surrounding the decision.

3) THAT A CORNER MAY USE THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE SCORES TO MANIPULATE CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE FIGHT. And of course, we're talking about a well-known incident involving Lou Duva, where he knew his fighter, Johnny Bumphus, was ahead on the cards but was cut and perhaps getting ready to lose the upper hand against Marlon Starling. There just happened to be open scoring in this particular bout, so instead of closing the cut, Duva left it alone and let it open up more, knowing that under the rules, if the fight had to be stopped, his man was in good shape because he was ahead. And of course, that's exactly what happened. People fear this happening more and more with open scoring. And it will, unless some steps are taking in the commission rules to prevent abuse in these cases. Commissions employ inspectors in the corners. They should put them to work. If a circumstance similar to the Bumphus-Starling incident exists, and the cornerman is not making every effort to close the cut, the inspector should have the latitude to report this to the referee, doctor, and commissioners. Points can be taken away, and/or disqualifications can be ruled. Suspensions should be in order for any cornerman who does not make good faith effort to keep his fighter as fit as possible by closing cuts when the necessity arises.

4) THAT IF A FIGHTER KNOWS HE'S WAY AHEAD, HE'LL JUST RUN AROUND AT THE END, MAKING FOR BORING FINISHES. Yes. But isn't this what happens 49 times out of 50, anyway? And if we made the adjustment we touched upon in #2 above, the effect would be minimized to some extent. Besides, when a fighter gets TOO careful, and stops trying, he sometimes falls into danger of being tagged.

5) THAT HE (MY FELLOW PANELIST) DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO KNOW THE SCORES AFTER EACH ROUND, BECAUSE IT WOULD JUST CONFUSE HIM IN HIS STRATEGIZING. Okay, this one I just can't take seriously. I know a little something about working in a corner, and I can tell you if a fighter's career is in my charge, I have a responsibility to give that fighter the best chance possible to win a fight. I don't want to get beat because I or my fellow cornerman miscalculated what we thought the scoring was going to be coming into the later rounds. I want all the information at my disposal that I can possibly get, and I would imagine any responsible cornerman would feel the same way.

I've got plenty of cornermen in my audience. Guys - let me know what YOU think.

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