Written by Charles Jay
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The man who can do the most for boxing - the quickest - is not Senator John McCain. It's not the other "boxing" politicians - Senators Byron Dorgan or Harry Reid. It's not Muhammad Ali, whose name graces the latest major boxing bill to become law. It's not Tim Lueckenhoff, president of the Association of Boxing Commissions. It's not Greg Sirb, who wants to become the national boxing "czar". It's not an outstanding fighter like Roy Jones Jr. or Bernard Hopkins. It's not the head of HBO. It's not the head of Showtime. It's not Don King. It's not Bob Arum. And it's not your humble reporter either.

We've had Senate hearings on boxing for the last two years, two pieces of legislation that are already in effect, two more that are going to be voted on, cries from nearly every well-meaning corner of the sport for uniform rules and regulations, consistent medical standards, reciprocal suspensions, a national boxing commission, and fighters' unions. And as you can see, we're in the midst of a special report on this website that has turned into more of an e-book, likely to go to as many as 75 installments (up from the original estimate of 40), which we certainly hope will have some kind of positive effect.

Yet one guy, in one night, can do more for the sport in the eyes of the general public than all of that stuff combined.

That's right - it's none other than Mike Tyson.

You know, most of the people who have written about Tyson's upcoming fight with Lennox Lewis have engaged in a kind of reverse logic; that is, they feel that the best thing that could possibly happen would be for the heavyweight champion of the world to slap the volatile challenger into oblivion, as if that is going to turn the "monster" away for good, and therefore save boxing.

And while I would concede that Tyson has left plenty of scars on the image of the game, they're not necessarily going to go away with his defeat, as ignominious as it might turn out. And chances are, Tyson himself won't go away either.

I don't know how much goodwill it's going to create for boxing if Tyson gets embarrassed, because frankly, I don't think Lewis (or anyone else, for that matter) possesses a high enough profile to carry the torch for the sport.

But Tyson does. Like it or not, right now, he IS boxing. He's bigger than the sport; and the only fighter in the world who truly transcends it, insofar as awareness of him creeps into every crevice of society, not just here in America but around the world. Despite Lewis' credentials, Tyson has carried this upcoming promotion almost completely on his own, as he does EVERY promotion. Without him, there IS no promotion. He's so big, in fact, that he dominated the Senate hearing on boxing two weeks ago, though I'm not sure anyone testifying at the hearing really intended for that to happen.

There is no athlete in the world who has more of an impact on his sport than Mike Tyson has on his.

Please understand - I'm not zeroing in on the fact that it would be best for boxing, from a financial point of view, if Tyson won the fight. That much may indeed be true, because let's face it - the presence of Iron Mike at the top of the heap has a ripple effect on everything, from the general health of the pay-per-view industry, all the way down to the traffic generated on websites like this one (the numbers don't lie - EVERYBODY'S numbers rise when a Tyson fight is upcoming).

But I'm more concerned with the aesthetics here. After all, I'm writing a series on boxing REFORM. And part of that formula has to take into account the public's perception of the sport, which may vary a little from demographic group to demographic group, but in general has been dwindling for quite some time.

So for purposes of my own angle, I'm saying that by keeping his nose clean from now until Saturday, then putting forth an honest, clean, world-class effort - regardless of whether he wins or loses - in his fight with Lewis, Tyson will go a long way toward re-establishing some credibility for an ailing sport.

In fact, not only can a well-behaved, competitive, professional Tyson be a great help in rehabilitating the image of boxing, I submit that, at least for the time being, ONLY he can do it. That is because the vast majority of people who are going to buy this fight on pay-per-view, and those who have contemplated it seriously but may be taking a pass just because Tyson is involved, are NOT necessarily boxing fans; everyone knows if the business relied on ardent boxing fans alone it would die on PPV. Hell, they may not even be sports fans. But they are people who MIGHT BECOME boxing fans, or at least ADMIRERS OF boxing, with the right impetus.

And they have one thing in common - they all know Mike Tyson, and they're all interested in him to some degree.

And I don't buy the "car crash" theory many people have come up with as it relates to fans, not entirely anyway. I don't think most people will be sitting in their living rooms, hoping to witness the next bizarre episode in what has become the most bizarre saga in sport. I certainly don't think anyone is paying between $400-$2000 to be at the Pyramid Arena so they can see Tyson try to break Lewis' arm in the first three rounds and get disqualified. I feel, given the choice, they would much rather see a GREAT FIGHT, don't you?

I mean, don't you think somebody would rather see some great action, with a feeling that he's gotten his money's worth, than walk away from the whole thing with the attitude that he had been cheated because of an indecisive ending, a foul, or a stinker of a fight?

Another benefit that would come out of a positive Tyson performance is that it would go a long way toward focusing the right people on the reform issues that have genuine, long-lasting effects on the sport. I've said on more than one occasion that those parties who

have chosen to use Mike Tyson as an example of why we need a national commission (namely, the ABC and the politicians in Washington) have completely missed the point, and as a result are doing a disservice to the general reform movement while more important issues get ignored.

Maybe all this is just wishful thinking, but perhaps if Tyson behaved and performed in such a way that they didn't have him to kick around any more, the ABC, for example, would have the good sense to move on to something a little more critical, like getting dangerous commissioners such as Kentucky's Jack Kerns, who puts fighters' lives at risk through his ignorance of Federal fighter safety laws, off its Board of Directors.

If Tyson's a good boy, he'll give them one less red herring with which to deflect attention away from that issue.

Not that he's thinking about that right now. But I certainly hope he has the presence of mind to realize that he's carrying an awesome responsibility into the ring on Saturday night in Memphis. And that he will do his best to fulfill it.

After all, this is still his business. And still his sport.

And when all is said and done, mark my words - being great, both inside the ring and out - will be GOOD for business.

AND good for the sport.

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