In a few days we'll be turning the page on 2003 and looking ahead to another year that is bound to be eventful- they almost always are.

But before we go full speed ahead to 2004, let's look back on what we've witnessed the past 12 months in the game of boxing.

And what we've found out is that sometimes the sports highlights, were also it's lowlights. Oftentimes, they were one in the same.

HIGHLIGHT: Vitali Klitschko's valiant performance against Lennox Lewis.

Coming in as a late replacement for Kirk Johnson, Klitschko would give the heavyweight champion all he could handle for six rounds before the fight was halted because of a grotesque cut over his left eye.
In fighting so well and bravely against Lewis, he not only changed the perception of himself, but off his whole fighting family. The Klitschko name had been redeemed.

LOWLIGHT: Lennox Lewis's behavior with HBO's Larry Merchant after that fight.

Lewis has been a very respectable and representative champion during his reign. But he acted like a downright brat in his post-fight interview with Larry Merchant on live television. When confronted with the truth, he tried to hijack the interview by yanking the microphone away from Merchant, who had to hold on for dear life. During the bout he looked like a fading fighter on a bad night. Afterwords, he looked like an infant in need of a timeout.

HIGHLIGHT: Arturo Gatti and Micky Ward complete their thrilling trilogy.

Gatti and Ward had a lot to live up to when they met for the third time this past June. And live up to it they did, in a fight with momentum shifts and a constantly changing ebb-and-flow. Gatti would overcome a damaged right hand to win a hard-fought ten round decision. It was a fitting conclusion to one of the games great rivalries and the career of Ward, who called it a day on a proud career.

LOWLIGHT: There will be no more Gatti-Ward in the future.

Which may actually be a good thing, because I'm not sure they could handle anymore of each other. But boxing will miss this rivalry.

HIGHLIGHT: Oscar De La Hoya and Shane Mosley rematch.

It's always good for the business of boxing when 'the Golden Boy' engages in a mega-fight. The interest is high- even among the usually apathetic general media- boxing becomes the showcase event in the world of sports and everyone involved: from the fighters, to the promoters, the pay-per-view outlets and casino's make money.

LOWLIGHT: De La Hoya's and Arum's reaction to the decision in that fight.

It's one thing to think that you won a close fight, it's even acceptable to complain about the decision. But the manner in which both Oscar and his promoter cast aspersions on the judges and Nevada State Athletic Commission, were low blows of the Andrew Golota variety. Luckily for them, they were only given light slaps on the wrists for their irresponsible and incendiary comments.

But the bottom line is they both hurt the sport with their allegations and the fact that more than one media outlet ran with their quotes, further hurt boxing's reputation.

HIGHLIGHT: Roy Jones makes history

In defeating John Ruiz for the WBA heavyweight belt, Jones became the first middleweight in over a hundred years to win a heavyweight crown. This fight also did very well, registering over 500,000 pay-per-view buys, which is always a good sign for the industry.

LOWLIGHT: Jones' indecisiveness after that win.

Jones had all the momentum in the world after his win over Ruiz, but instead of capitalizing on it, he tried to pinch pennies with Evander Holyfield, threw out astronomical numbers for a fight with Mike Tyson(which is a loooong ways from ever happening) and then had to settle for a rather non-descript fight back at light heavyweight against Antonio Tarver.

HIGHLIGHT- Toney turns the 'Lights Out' on Holyfield

James Toney had seemingly been in exile since his embarrassing loss to Roy Jones in 1994. But he came back strong in 2003 with wins over Vassiliy Jirov and then a stoppage of Evander Holyfield, which stamped his entrance into the heavyweight division. The game can always use a few good big men and who cares if that comes in the form of former middleweights like Toney and Jones.

LOWLIGHTS: Holyfield isn't retiring.

'The Real Deal' maintained that he wouldn't retire till he won the undisputed title or got his hat handed to him. Well, after this bout it was evident that the former wasn't happening and the latter did. But like most other great fighters, they are the last to know when it's time to call it a day.

HIGHLIGHT: 'Pac Man' gobbles up Barrera.

It's always shocking and uplifting when a fighter bursts onto the scene and elevates himself the way Manny Pacquiao did against Marco Antonio Barrera this past November. Barrera, had universal acclaim as one of the sports premiere pound-for-pound performers. Pacquiao, while a respected fighter, was thought to be just a notable opponent for Barrera.

Instead, Barrera would get blitzed by the all-out, frenetic attack of the Filipino. Barrera would be simply overwhelmed by the punches of Pacquiao and his corner would have to rescue him from the onslaught of the southpaw in the eleventh round.

LOWLIGHT: Murad Muhammad allegedly gobbles up Pacquiao.

This was mentioned prominently on the HBO broadcast that out of the $700,000 license fee given to Pacquiao's promoter, Murad Muhammad, only about $300,000 had gone to the fighter. And that was before the money was cut up in various ways.

Once source close to the situation tells me that after all was said and done, Pacquiao, wound up with about $80,000. It looks like he may have taken a worse beating than the one he gave out.

HIGHLIGHT: Johnny Tapia comes out of a coma in January.

You gotta hand it to Tapia, most guys take standing eight counts, this little guy takes mandatory flat lines, this is about the third or fourth time he's been close to dead only to come off the canvas. Once again after another relapse in drugs, he would be in an intensive care unit battling for his life. As friends, family and loved ones surrounded him, he would beat the odds once again to walk out of the hospital and fight again.

LOWLIGHTS: Tapia reportedly overdoses in December.

Tapia swears that he did not overdose, but rather took some cold medication that he had an allergic reaction to. Uh, ok, sure, whatever you guys say. But do they have to insult everyone's intelligence, here? Isn't it time that Tapia got some real help for his problems?