In our time, when a boxing champion's reign revolves around devalued title belts, fought within weight limit sub-categorizations for the sake of television programming validation, moving up into ever higher divisions to acquire more and more hard-ware, equates to a common business practice, common principle for greatness. And just as the mission of professional boxers is the acquisition of 'serious' money, so the athletic ego - the engine of fistic ambition - desires distinction, singularity and the glorification of being a unique athletic entity.

Not that champion boxers are anything like mainstream sporting figures, in 2004. That assertion notwithstanding, there are a select few who defy the imperative for weight escalation, such as Bernard Hopkins or even debatably, Joe Calzaghe. Those names are exceptions, exceptional holdouts, staying put at one weight for the duration of their careers, rooted to a classical notion of optimization, their stoic belief of 'ideal weight' a counterpoint against the marketing logic of risk-ward extremism.

Simply put, Hopkins and trainer Bouie Fischer determined, in 1992, the ideal body configuration and weight for Bernard Hopkins to compete as a professional boxer to be 160. Over the course of moving from his development phase, rebounding from his 1993 loss to Roy Jones in his first title quest, through a distinguished IBF title reign, Team Hopkins settled on a rigorous cardio based regiment to keep the 6' 1" Hopkins cut down to the 160 pound margin. Needless to say, only the work ethic of a Bernard Hopkins could maintain such a body configuration at 39; we note this, as we also tip our hat to his technical and stylistic brilliance.

Hopkins, having determined his place for exhibiting his 'best practices', literally outlasted his generation of middleweights from William Joppy to Keith Holmes and, significantly, Roy Jones and James Toney, waits for future competition to emerge from lower orders, those locked into the ethic of 'moving up' in weight to determine their historical signification. In a sense, the mental rationalization was to look for more title belts, worlds to conquer, intersecting with pay per view level rivals and yet the point of compromise was optimization. Fighting thus becomes an act of rationalization, and increasingly, self-proscribed mitigation, with one’s athletic motor capacities devalued, in place of compensating defaults. Muhammad Ali and Roy Jones and Ray Robinson absorbing punishment to tie George Foreman or dissuade Antonio Tarver or find a miracle against Paul Pender.

This is a contentious issue, fighters being most susceptible to either the belief that they can reconfigure their bodies for any reasonable re-categorization i.e. Morales, Barrera, De La Hoya, Jones, Lewis, etc or re-constitute their bodies for extreme career retooling - Holyfield, Paz, Toney, Mosley, etc.

There are subtleties to understand, points of rationalization to be addressed. Take the emaciated figure of Erik Morales at 122 or super bantamweight. Youthful and driven enough to dry out his body to limit of competent dehydration, in order to maximize his height-strength ratio - his 5' 8" body essentially devoid of a subcutaneous fat layering - Morales ably played the big

little man, when besting formidable foes from Junior Jones and Wayne McCullough to Marco Antonio Barrera.

The tortuous art of scaling down to be 'massive' fighting at an artificially low weight is achieved by diet targeting and controlled dehydration strictures. "El Terrible" went on to win titles at featherweight and jr. lightweight, the names of foes defeated a remarkable cross section of the best of a generation. His early career of forced minimization has garnered the native of Tijuana, Mexico a spot among the legends of his generation and perhaps of all time. And one might well argue that the stratification of the 'traditional' eight weight categories has served to facilitate the demarcating of Morales, not just his talented fists.

Perhaps, we are judging the great Morales harshly, for one can also assert that had he chosen to stake out the featherweight division from the inception of his career, his career ledger would, in all likelihood, have read nearly the same as it does currently. As well, and more bluntly, James Toney effectively ate his way out of middle and super-middleweight to the ionosphere of a Klitschko ruled heavyweight division. By this reckoning James Toney and Vinnie Paz share the x-treme award for self-manipulation and body morphing for the purposes of defying the boundaries of even the ethic of weight escalation. Yes, Toney does have Mickey Walker as his pseudo forerunner. But we have strained credulity enough already.

The ethic for 'moving up to define greatness' is so ingrained today that by common report or skeptical retort, Hopkins himself - though peerless at 160 - has also been the subject of criticism for not having chosen to take on the belt holders at 168 or 175, during his decade of eminence. Just as some revisionist history has begun (in earnest?) on the choices make by superstar Roy Jones Jr. Did Jones tailor his career opponents listing, fighting mandatories simply to maximize his HBO money and be able to freelance as a hoopster? Of course!

And of course we are teasing to point out Jones' penchant for trading off and speculating on his future as greatness personified. Thus the elemental rub against Jones; did he fight and challenge himself to the full measure of his manifest talent? Most agree he did not; he chose not to do so. He sought the maximization of monetary gain while establishing the dominance of his presentation as a singular boxing genius. Which most all agree he was! But it was in the fabrication of his quests at multiple weights, avoiding the deep contenders fields at middleweight and super-middleweight at the start and middle of his career ascendancy that becomes thee basis point for skeptical debate upon the subject of Roy Jones Jr., consensus boxing genius.

Again, we can assert, Jones did nothing more than extend the custom and practice of most championship level fighters, save for the excessive and exclusionary selection process to do with much of his title defenses. Title defenses, we also remember, that had Roy Jones as the promoter, agent and fighter (titlist) and his opponent a subcontractor to Jones.

Shane Mosley's bulking up to maximize his strength-speed ratio did secure him a pair of career wins over Oscar De La Hoya. Seeking popular and professional redress for having been mired in the obscurity, his transfer from lightweight to welterweight justified itself as a financial win-fall and mega-fight victory. Just as De La Hoya was to find out against Bernard Hopkins, sometimes

the destination of historical import is a bridge too far.

Mosley found out just how difficult being welterweight champion could be against Vernon Forrest, and this year jr. middleweight champion against "Winky" Wright. Securing the pay days become pay offs from the perspective of realizing historical singularity. One only has to consider Shane Mosley as a career campaigner at 140 up to 147, taking the brunt and best of Arturo Gatti, Micky Ward, Kostya Tszyu, Floyd Mayweather and then with impetuous necessity Cory Spinks, Vernon Forrest or Oscar De La Hoya twice, at 147. Think of how different would have been his health – one's true wealth – his legacy, his realization of historical merit.

Yes, perhaps it's a necessary illusion of the age, this notion that history will laud only those who have collected multiple belts, paying any and all prices. Is there a reasonable middle ground between the over elaborations of Roy Jones' "I" business trade offs, Shane Mosley's musclebound fool-(all)heartiness and the Teutonic stance of Bernard Hopkins?

Better to pretend there's a middle ground, where reason and risk can make the distinctions between opportunity and fatalism. Right? If everyone who's more than moderately competent can nab a "world title" then how far off can "history" really be? Can't these guys see right in front of them?

Too bad more smart people in boxing don't play more chess. You know, so either fighters or their trusted aids can figure out the truest end game, with history and security realized. There must be an easy formula, right?

History isn't what it used to be anyway. Being historically significant is as overrated as you can get these days. Or for that matter, can't they get that in their agreements with HBO and Showtime. All they have to say is, "this fight is one for the ages."

How hard can that be?

It's not like history is something to be heeded, more like put upon.

Or is that imposed upon?