

February Funk

Written by Steve Kim
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This Saturday night at the MGM Grand we have a pretty good doubleheader on HBO featuring Jesus Chavez defending his WBC jr. lightweight title against Erik Morales and bright, young Puerto Rican prospect Miguel Cotto taking on his toughest test to date against Victoriano Sosa.

It's a great way to end the month of February for two reasons: First, it's an attractive card. And more importantly, it means we're almost out of this wretched month. The bottom line is that February is a virtual 'black hole' for sports fans.

Think about it, after the Super Bowl wraps up, sports fans are in an abyss of meaningless basketball games and uninteresting hockey games (some will argue that that's a repetitive phrase, after all, it's hockey) but what compounds this is that boxing for some reason never capitalizes on this dead month. Yes, I realize that we had a card on Showtime that featured James Toney against Jameel McClintock and Kostya Tszyu going up against Shamba Mitchell once again, before injuries decimated that card.

Seriously, why in a month where the biggest event is the Daytona 500, doesn't boxing take advantage of this vacuum by putting on some bigger events?

(And that's another question I have about NASCAR, why is their Super Bowl their first event of the year? I mean, it's like having the World Series in April or the Stanley Cup in October. But I digress.)

The powers that be in boxing are loathe to put on big fights up against other big sporting events because boxing has enough problems getting coverage from the major media outlets when it doesn't have to compete with the likes of the Super Bowl, Final Four, World Series and NBA Finals. I can see not wanting to put on big events in January against the NFL Playoffs or in March against 'March Madness' which has turned into one of the most anticipated sporting events every year.

But why not February? In many ways it's the perfect month. With the weather being so cold in many areas, the levels of television viewing are usually very high—at least much higher than they are in the summer months—which makes it conducive to higher pay-per-view numbers. Seriously, I know boxing is not

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held in the same regard it was back in the day, but I'd still like to think that a truly big fight could more than hold it's own to the phrase, 'pitchers and catchers report'. I mean, c'mon it's baseball, something that goes into November now.

I have one theory as to why big fights don't happen in this dreadful month- it's too close to the holiday season, which means that if a fighter, let's say like Oscar De La Hoya or a Shane Mosley, who have already made millions of dollars, they along with many other fighters simply don't want to train during the holiday season. Yeah, fighters are amongst the most disciplined athletes in the world- when they're in training. When they're not, they can be among the worlds biggest gluttons.

Fighters love to fight right before Thanksgiving and then after February. Why? It's simple. They can enjoy turkey and all the stuffing they want without having to worry about their weight and then go onto to enjoy Christmas. You'd be surprised how many times I've been told by managers and fighters themselves that they don't want to fight in January and February because it would cut down on their holiday, uhh, spirit, if you know what I mean.

But you know what? Fighters have bills to pay and it's not exactly the most fertile marketplace out there for fighters, schedule a big payday in February and they will come. The bottom line is that most fighters today are simply not in a position to turn down HBO or Showtime fights because there's no telling when they will ever get that opportunity again.

How bad has this month been? Well, the two biggest things concerning this sport have centered on Lennox Lewis' retirement and Oscar De La Hoya possibly facing Bernard Hopkins in September. Now, those are admittedly big stories in any month, but nothing helps the business of boxing than big fights that happen currently. Instead of talking about fights that are happening now, we're more focused on a heavyweight that we'll most likely never see again and a fight that might happen in about seven months. Even George Foreman's publicity stunt to help his new clothing line, where he talked of coming back at age 55 was big news this month. Why? Because nothing else was going on.

Fights, make fights, which make other fights. That's how the business works and thrives. And starting on March 6th, when Joel Casamayor and Diego Corrales go at it again, we go on a great run

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of attractive match-ups. The next week we have Shane Mosley
facing Winky Wright, two weeks later Jermain Taylor and
Dominick Guinn continue their rise up the rankings in
an Arkansas homecoming, then April 10th, we have Cory Spinks
boxing Zab Judah and Wladimir Klitschko taking on Lamon Brewster
and then on the 24th we have Wlad's brother Vitaly taking on Corrie
Sanders in a family grudge match.

I can't wait for those fights. Because right now I'm bored out of my
mind. I can see why bears hibernate during these months.

PROUD AS A PEACOCK

Also starting in April is NBC's return to boxing with Main Events.
Last year the two combined to make a relatively successful return to
the sport and they're doing it again this year. Yeah, Main Events
had to bring in their own sponsors but nothing beats network
exposure for their young prospects. Through April 17th
till May 15th, NBC will showcase guys like Rocky Juarez,
Juan Diaz and Kermit Cintron.

My question is this, will there be another network that will step up to
the plate and perhaps use the same business model as NBC and
Main Events? Seriously, without giving a license fee, what do they
really have to lose?

Another question I have is, with ESPN2 seemingly phasing out
boxing, will Fox Sports, with the addition of Max Kellerman, up their
commitment to the sport?

Signing Kellerman and not utilizing him on boxing, is like getting
Barry Bonds and batting him seventh in your lineup.