

The Half-Year Awards in Boxing

Written by Steve Kim
Monday, 28 June 2004 21:00

We're heading into the last days of June and into the thick of a long, hot summer. Which means that half the year is over and if the second half of the year is anything like the first, boxing will have had quite an eventful year.

Who knows what the next six months holds in store for boxing? For all we know the game could have already given us the best it has to offer for 2004. Or, maybe, just maybe, it was a prelude to some spectacular happenings that are still to come.

That's the beauty of boxing, good or bad, it's full of surprises. But we can reflect on what has happened in front of our eyes already. So with that, I present to you the IBOP, Half-Year Awards for 2004.

FIGHTER OF THE HALF-YEAR: Antonio Tarver

It's going to take a lot to take out the talkative Tarver in this category. I mean, he didn't just beat Roy Jones in their rematch, he starched him with a single punch. He not only knocked Jones off his perch as the best fighter in the world pound-for-pound, he has historians and fans alike questioning his place in history.

Before this fight Jones was considered by some as an elite, all-time great. Now? Well, let's put it this way, I don't see as many people saying his name in the same breath as Sugar Ray Robinson as I did just a few months ago.

FIGHT OF THE HALF-YEAR: Manny Pacquiao Draw 12 Juan Manuel Marquez

This bout here should go down as one of the best featherweight battles in history. The 'Pac Man' would floor Marquez three times in the first, only to have Marquez methodically box his way back from the brink to nearly pull out the fight.

In many ways it was appropriate that it was a draw, because on this night, nobody lost.

KNOCKOUT OF THE HALF-YEAR: Tarver KO2 Jones

It was even more shocking if you were there ringside, trust me. Most of us had never seen Jones hit that hard before, much less stretched out like he was. Being there was almost surreal. If you watch the fight on tape, look out into the audience and see how many jaws you see dropping on the floor.

And think about this, has there ever been a time when a supposed all-time great got knocked out by a single, solitary punch, like Jones was?

UPSET OF THE HALF-YEAR: Lamon Brewster KO5 Wladimir Klitschko

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Brewster was a heavy underdog against the giant Ukrainian and was taking the worst of it when suddenly Klitschko seemed to tire badly in the fifth and Brewster hurt him with a left hook. At the end of the round Klitschko would fall to the floor, unable to get up to the satisfaction of referee Robert Byrd, who waved off the fight.

As bizarre as that ending was, it was just as exhilarating to see the emotion and pure joy of Brewster, who had dedicated this fight to his original trainer and mentor Bill Slayton, who had passed away months earlier.

Shortly afterwards the Klitschko camp would come up with more conspiracy theories than Oliver Stone, but thankfully their pleas fell on deaf ears.

ROBBERY OF THE HALF-YEAR: Matt Vanda W10 Sam Garr

You want to talk about your classic 'hometown decision?' This fight here should be placed in the Webster Dictionary as its definition.

Most anyone that saw that fight on ESPN2's Friday Night Fights will tell you that Garr, a solid veteran, had to have won at least seven or eight of the ten rounds. But sadly and predictably, Garr would lose a split decision in a state whose boxing commission was done away with by former wrestler, turned Governor, Jesse Ventura.

The irony is not hard to miss, is it?

TRAINER OF THE HALF-YEAR: Joe Goossen

Goossen was in an interesting spot when Diego Corrales tabbed him as the chief second for his rematch against Joel Casamayor this past March. Goossen had trained Casamayor for the past five years and was in the corner of the southpaw, Cuban when he beat Corrales last October.

Well, this being boxing, somehow Goossen was now in 'Chico's' corner for the return bout.

And it wasn't just the fact that Corrales evened things up with Casamayor that gets him this award, but the fact that he had Corrales - a pure puncher, who likes to walk straight in and bang - boxing and sticking his jab from the outside. He essentially out-boxed a slick boxer. Now, that's training.

STORY OF THE HALF-YEAR: FBI raids Top Rank

Was anyone out there not a bit stunned that the Feds came storming into the offices of Top Rank? Seriously, I thought the FBI only did that stuff to Don King? Since that point in early January, there have been plenty of rumors and innuendo about the dealing of Bob Arum and his employees. One manager, Bob Mittleman, has already admitted to fixing fights in the past. Who knows what will come of this next?

Maybe this will be impetus for real reform in this game. Or perhaps nothing comes out of this.

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But Top Rank deserves due process like anybody else. It could be that this is a huge story, or really not a story at all. We shall see.

PANAMA LEWIS OF THE HALF-YEAR AWARD: Stacy McKinley

Just last week Tito Mendoza gave a brave and gallant effort in losing against Librado Andrade. He would get floored twice early on to survive all 12 rounds. But it turns out that his cornerman, McKinley, had used smelling salts - which have been outlawed for years - to help revive his man. McKinley was reprimanded by the California Athletic Commission and will most likely be suspended. Mendoza, had his check withheld.

The number one priority of a corner is not to help a fighter win a fight, but to ensure his safety. What they did was not only illegal, but even more importantly, dangerous. A fighter who needs to be revived that way should not be fighting - bottom line. Boxing is already a dangerous game, it doesn't need to be made any riskier.

McKinley and another cornerman reportedly defended themselves by claiming ignorance of the rule. In that case, their infraction is even worse - because it's their jobs to know. Either they're lying or truly ignorant, and with the responsibility a corner has to a fighter, neither should be tolerated.