

Mike Tyson Sells

Written by Rick Folstad
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The sports section of my local paper didn't include any coverage of the recent Paulie Ayala - Marco Antonio Barrera fight.

Nothing.

Before that, my local paper failed to preview the Bernard Hopkins and Oscar De La Hoya double-header other than to report that Hopkins was threatening to pull out of the fight because he didn't like the referee.

Controversy sells.

The day after the Hopkins and De La Hoya fights, my local paper didn't run a story on the results, but the following Monday, it ran a piece on the future of De La Hoya.

Before that, my local paper didn't report that Roy Jones Jr. was knocked out in the second round by Antonio Tarver until - again - two days later in a follow-up story about Tarver's future.

Sports deadlines can be tough, but the Jones-Tarver fight was over early. The sports desk probably wasn't looking for the story and after seeing it, probably decided it didn't have any space left.

My local paper doesn't cover much boxing because the sports editor is like a lot of other sports editors across the country. He's not a big fan.

He doesn't know John Ruiz from Hasim Rahman, or Ricardo Mayorga from Ricky Ricardo. Sure, he's heard of Vitali Klitschko, but he's not sure what European soccer team he plays for.

It's not his fault. He can recite the present standings of NASCAR and tell you who is behind the wheel of each car in the Nextel Cup. He knows who coaches the Knicks, who quarterbacks the Bucs and who plays shortstop for the Marlins.

But he doesn't know how to pronounce Kostya Tszyu, who Lamon Brewster is or what IBF stands for.

Still, all this past week, the paper followed the continuing soap opera of Mike Tyson, who hasn't fought in almost a year and a half, hasn't fought for a title in two years and hasn't held a world title in almost eight years.

Tuesday, the paper ran a story under a big headline saying Tyson was granted a license to fight in New Jersey.

Thursday, the paper ran another big story saying New Jersey Governor James McGreevey was

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not going to allow Tyson to fight in any state-owned facility.

Then Saturday, our paper ran a story about Tyson and promoter Don King. "Tyson settling his suit vs. King," the headline read. It included a mug shot of Tyson.

In one five-day span, Tyson - without even fighting - received more coverage in my local paper than Tarver has received in his entire career.

Again, you can't blame the sports editor. He knows what people will read. He knows if they see the name "Tyson" in a headline, most readers will take the time to read the story.

Right or wrong, it's the nature of the beast. Tyson could single-handedly bring the fight game back from the near dead. And that says a lot about the sport of boxing.

It says a lot about all of us.