

2004 Olympic Boxing: Two Days, Two Conclusions

Written by Frank Lotierzo
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After watching the first two days of the boxing competition at the 2004 Summer Games, I've come to two conclusions. They are etched solidly in my mind and it would take something monumental for me to accept I am wrong. The first determination I've made is that the computerized scoring system literally sucks! I thought it when I first saw it and today I'm even more convinced of it. The second thing I've noticed is that along with the flawed scoring system, the judging is biased in the favor of two countries.

First, the computer scoring system: there are 5 judges who sit around the ring apron with a key pad in front of them. The key pad has two keys that are marked red and blue, which represent each fighter. For a fighter to be awarded a point, 3 of the 5 judges must press the key for the fighter that landed the punch with the white portion of his Boxing glove within one second. While that may sound like a fair and unbiased way to score an Olympic boxing match, it doesn't seem to translate that way during the bouts. I found it very frustrating seeing fighters scoring with clean punches, and not one single point scored.

I can't count how many bouts I watched over the six hours of the televised coverage where I saw ineptness in the scoring and awarding of points to different boxers. In many of those instances, I witnessed fighters land a succession of clean and legal blows without a single point being tabulated. Other times I saw where one fighter land one clean single blow that was obvious, and not a single point awarded. Along with that I saw many clean punches landed to the upper torso and body, without a single point awarded.

During Sunday's televised bouts, analyst Teddy Atlas did mention this during the first bout and throughout the rest of the broadcast. Although it is clearly stated in the rules that punches to the upper torso count, I didn't see any evidence of points being scored for fighters who landed a clean punch to his opponent's stomach or chest. It was obvious that only punches scored to the head and face were counted and awarded points. This leaves me to ask why? Is it just plain and simple ineptness, or is there more to it? I don't know the answer, but I do know that these oversights definitely exist.

Another thing that I couldn't help but take note of was the scoring of the bouts with either a Cuban or Russian fighter. Since boxing became an Olympic sport in 1908, American and Russian Boxers have won the most medals and were perceived to be the best. The Munich Games in 1972 was the first time that Cuban boxers participated in the Olympics. From 1972 through 1988, the United States and Cuba dominated the medal count, winning the most Gold, Silver, and Bronze. However, since the 1988 Games, the United States has only won two Gold medals and was shut out of a Gold medal in the 2000 Games in Sydney, Australia.

Starting with the 1992 Games in Barcelona, Spain, the Russian boxers have replaced the American boxers as one of the two premier boxing squads at the Olympics. Heading into these 2004 Games, the Cubans and the Russians are the teams that are favored to bring home the most medals in the boxing competition. This standing has definitely been earned by these two

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excellent boxing teams. Any objective observer would have to admit that over the last 12 years, the Cuban and Russian boxers have separated themselves from the rest of the World.

I'm not a person who usually sees a conspiracy behind everything that doesn't appear to be as it should. And I'm not taking anything away from the Cuban and Russian fighters or making any excuses for their success. But, I have no doubt that either the judges are a little overwhelmed by their presence, or are intimidated by them and give them the benefit of every borderline call.

In watching the boxing competition at these 2004 Summer Games, it seems that the Cuban and Russian fighters don't have to be nearly as perfect as the other fighters in order to have points awarded to them. I noticed that even when they are close with their punches or land a glancing blow, points seem to be tallied for them. It seems that the judges err on the side of favoring them, figuring that since they are viewed as the best, they won't be called on it. Adopting the silent mindset, of course those punches where clean shots, everybody knows they're the best?

Again, I don't look for conspiracies, and I'm not even saying there is one in regards to the scoring in favor of the Cuban and Russian boxers. However, it seems that all they have to do is get close to their opponents with their punches and the points tabulate. I saw it happen too many times and believe there is some favoritism towards the Russian and Cuban fighters. Many times I saw fighters from other countries land a bevy of blows to their Russian or Cuban opponent and not get a single point. Yet the Russian or Cuban fighter countered back with one grazing punch and was awarded points.

After watching the first two days of the boxing competition at the 2004 Summer Olympics, I've drawn two conclusions that I am very firm on. The computerized scoring system absolutely sucks and should be scrapped after these Olympic Games. And the Russian and Cuban fighters get the benefit of every close call in the scoring. For any fighter from another Country to defeat them, they have an uphill climb. The Russians and Cubans are outstanding fighters, and the way I see it, the judges don't require the same perfection from them as they do fighters from other countries.