

The Dog Days of Summer

Written by Steve Kim

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There isn't really too much going on in the game of boxing as we wind down the summer months. Usually this is a period of time where promoters are reluctant to put on large promotions because studies have shown that viewer-ship of television is at its lowest and most folks are wrapping up their summer vacations.

Add to the fact that this is an Olympic year and most of your major newspapers and publications will send their columnists and writers to Athens, Greece. It would be even tougher to get coverage of big fights from those same writers who usually ignore the game of boxing when they're in town.

For fans of pugilism, this is purgatory. Boxing at the big time level will not start up again till early September. But that doesn't mean that absolutely nothing is going on. Just because the biggest names in boxing are idle and the two major premium networks, HBO and Showtime, won't be back for a few weeks, things are still happening that will shape the future.

It's a like a baseball game that's scoreless after five innings. Just because the game is 0-0, a lot of things, big and small, could have happened in that time frame.

For instance, this past Friday night a pair of JC's were upset on Friday the 13th in huge upsets. First, on ESPN2's Friday Night Fights, junior middleweight contender JC Candelo was supposed to have taken on Joachim Alcine in a battle of well schooled boxers. Instead, as Alcine would fail his medicals, in his place came Eddie Sanchez, who was picked out because he had gone to the press conference the day before. Sanchez, didn't go there looking for a fight, but to bum a free meal- which means he has a future as a writer when he's done with this boxing gig- and on one days notice, he upset Candelo.

Now, Sanchez, who had upset prospect Jose Celaya in his previous bout, is now suddenly a player. All because he wanted some stale cold cuts on the house. Candelo, who just last year gave a valiant effort against Winky Wright, is now on a two fight skid and falling fast off the radar.

On that same night in Laredo, Texas, JC Gomez, a former WBC cruiserweight titlist and fledgling heavyweight, was making his return to the ring after an 11-month hiatus. We had last seen Gomez, a former Cuban standout, take a 10-round decision over Sanil Sam on HBO. Since then, he had broken away from Sugar Ray Leonard's promotional firm and changed managerial teams. He would be making his return against Yamplier Azcuy, a fellow Cuban, who was thought to be nothing more than a club fighter.

Gomez, came in at a very soft 228 pounds in a pair of mis-matching blue gym shorts. He came into the ring dancing and smiling and early on smiled at his adversary in disdain when he charged him early. But then suddenly and shockingly, Azcuy would land perhaps the best right hand of his career and stun Gomez, sending him to the ropes. Azcuy, a rugged and unrefined

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fighter, would press his attack and proceeded to club away at Gomez. After four or five successive right hands to the side of Gomez's head, the referee would stop the fight as an unresponsive Gomez slumped on the ropes.

After 38 wins and a multitude of world title defenses as a cruiserweight, Gomez would lose to a guy who shouldn't even be his sparring partner. If there was ever a sure thing, this was it.

I guess that's why they fight, the fight.

In other news, after months of denials, Joe Mesi and his team finally admitted to having a brain hematoma - in layman's terms that means bleeding on the brain, which was caused by the late blows that he took from Vassiliy Jirov in March. ESPN2's color commentator Teddy Atlas had broken the story several months ago and the Nevada State Athletic Commission had put Mesi on medical suspension.

This news was met with utter disgust by the Mesi family who believed that their trust had been violated. And perhaps it had, but would they have been violating boxing by trying to keep that same news hidden and fighting on? What would the repercussions have been if Mesi - who is a high-profile personality in the sport - had engaged in a lucrative bout and had been injured seriously?

What effect would that have had on the game and industry as a whole?

Many had speculated that Mesi's father and manager, Jack, had been suppressing the news in order to get one last mega-payday in before cashing out. But through all these denials, you knew something was up when there was nothing planned for Mesi the last several months. Think about, Mesi, the media darling/Great White Hope, who had become an HBO fixture, suddenly didn't have anything scheduled? Why would that be? It didn't add up.

Then when his promoter Tony Holden suddenly resigned a couple of weeks ago, you knew something was fishy. If Holden, who was sitting on a potential gold mine, was going to walk away, you knew something was up.

Predictably, Mesi and his representatives say that they will fight for the right to continue boxing. Some will say, 'Hey, it's his health, why shouldn't he be allowed to continue?' It is an interesting stance - one with some merit and even precedence. Hey, if Marco Antonio Barrera can continue fighting with a steel plate in his head, should Mesi be excluded from competition?

It's hard to argue that point, you must admit.

But can boxing, who needs a Mesi-like attraction, afford to have him fight on? What will be interesting is to see if Nevada's suspension will be honored by the other commissions throughout the country. That particular commission, for all it's controversies, is by far the most influential and powerful in the United States. If some rogue commission goes against them, perhaps it signals loud and clear that there should be some form of a national commission.

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Speaking of the NSAC, one of it's more notable figures says he is making a comeback. No, it's not a fighter, but referee Richard Steele, who called it day as the third man in the ring a few years ago.

You gotta love the irony of this, I guess Steele, who gained infamy for his decisions to stop Julio Cesar Chavez-Meldrick Taylor I and Mike Tyson-Razor Ruddock I - halted his own career prematurely, too.

See, even when there's nothing going on, something is always happening.