

Boxing Returns, But Are These Title Fights?

Written by Steve Kim

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The game of boxing is back this Saturday night, after its late summer hiatus, with a doubleheader from the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas that features WBO heavyweight titlist Lamon Brewster against Kali 'Checkmate' Meehan, and undisputed welterweight king Cory Spinks facing Miguel Angel Gonzalez. Notice I didn't call this a 'championship doubleheader' or anything like that. Not that I have anything against either Brewster or Spinks, who have worked hard for their hardware. But let's be honest, yes, belts are on the line, but these are hardly championship caliber fights.

Brewster is facing a professional rugby player who was born in New Zealand in Meehan, who cuts an imposing figure at 6'5", 230 pounds. He seems like a nice guy and Brewster, who had him in camp prior to his upset win over Wladimir Klitschko in April, has nothing but nice things to say about him.

I'm sure he'll try his best and give a spirited effort in there, but it's hard to ignore his pedigree coming into this bout. While his record looks good on the surface at 29-1, he's fought a collection of second and third tier fighters in Australia. Names like Don Ulberg, James Grima, Peter Okhelo, Tone Fiso, Emilio Leti and Bob Mirovic dot his resume.

Oh, and about that '1' on his record? That would be none other than Danny Williams—y'know, the guy that just stopped Mike Tyson a few weeks back—who knocked out Meehan in a mere 32 seconds.

Most objective rankings don't place Meehan in their top 30 and some have speculated (and perhaps rightly so) that what Meehan really did to deserve this title shot is to sign with Don King.

Maybe there could be an upset here, after all, Brewster is still the same guy that has losses to Clifford Etienne and Charles Shufford. But then it begs this question, is Meehan in that class of those prizefighters?

We'll see, but I'm betting he gets checkmated.

The other half of this twin bill is filled out by Spinks' defense of his welterweight championship against Gonzalez. Now this is an intriguing fight—in 1997.

Now, never mind that Spinks made his pro debut that year and was 19 years old, but that's about the last year that Gonzalez was really a threat at the world class level. It says here that a fight in 1997 between the two could very well have been more competitive than what we'll see this weekend.

There was a time when Gonzalez was a very respected fighter on the world class scene. He was a long standing WBC lightweight champion in the early-to-mid 90's who challenged Oscar De La Hoya for the WBC jr. welterweight title in January of 1997. After nearly getting his head

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knocked off his neck by the piston-like jab of De La Hoya, he would come on strong in the late rounds in losing a hard-fought decision to 'the Golden Boy.'

It would be the last we'd see of the Gonzalez that could compete at the highest level. In March of 1998 he would struggle to salvage a draw against a badly faded Julio Cesar Chavez. Then in August of 1999 he would be systematically taken apart by Kostya Tszyu in ten lopsided rounds. Two bouts later he would be out-hustled by Manuel Gomez, who at that time was nothing more than a tough Mexican journeyman.

But what's really eye-opening is what happened after his loss to Gomez—who to Gonzalez's credit has become a world class 147-pounder. After taking more than a year off, he embarked on a comeback tour where he wasn't exactly facing 'Murderers Row.'

First he would face Roberto Lopez, who according to boxrec.com, had a mark of 0-0. Predictably, Gonzalez would stop him in three rounds. Then he would face Christian Solano, who at least has pro experience with a record of 1-2-1, who he stopped in five. Then Gregorio Balcazar was next with a ledger of 7-3, who didn't get out of the first round. Then came Noberto Sandoval, who was 7-11 (which was his record, not the convenience store), who was halted in three and in his latest bout Gonzalez faced the 11-4 Ernesto Carmona who lasted ten stanzas before succumbing.

Perhaps this is King's way of rewarding Spinks who has defeated Ricardo Mayorga and Zab Judah in his last two bouts. But here's the problem, Spinks and his slick style aren't compelling when he's facing live opposition, you can only imagine what type of snooze-fest this could turn into when facing the slow-as-molasses Gonzalez.

Spinks is a guy, like any other prizefighter, who wants to have his profile elevated and become a consistent big money fighter, who is always involved in lucrative bouts. This fight against Gonzalez, simply doesn't achieve that goal.

So there you have it, Brewster-Meehan and Spinks-Gonzalez, which takes place on Labor Day weekend. And it could wind up being hard work for boxing fans that have to watch this.