Beliefs are what divide people. Doubt unites them.
Peter Ustinov (1921 – 2004)

British boxing fans are only too accustomed to eking out the gems from the rocks in the modern boxing calendar. So the BBBofC decision to pit world-class Welterweight contender James Hare against blossoming champion David Barnes sparkled like the rarity it is.

The much-maligned fan forums hummed and crackled with anticipation, a genuine contest between two capable and hungry fighters. Sceptics scoffed, 'too good to be true,' 'it'll never happen!'

But, despite confusion and delays, on November 12th the battle for domestic supremacy in an increasingly talent-laden division will take place and oft-disappointed fans will bask in a rare victory over their sceptical counterparts. And more importantly, British boxing will have a proper fight to enjoy.

So why all the confusion, and wasn't the fight scheduled for October 1st?

I spoke to James Hare, an affable and friendly fighter who, typically, was more interested in the fight than the negotiations surrounding it. I asked James about the confusion over whether the fight was ever signed to appear on the Hatton undercard, Sports Network's claim that it never was, and the news that a venue and date is to be announced shortly? James commented:

"As far as we're concerned, I was preparing for the 1st October but since the phone call last week I have lightened up the training, taken a week off and will return to it next week in preparation for the November date. At the end of the day, I have nothing but respect for Barnes and whilst putting a show together across promotional companies is always difficult - often people don't know what's happening - what matters is my preparation is good and that I'm ready for November 12th. And if any problems arise then, we'll address them as they come up."

There have been some curious circumstances surrounding the timing of this bout—was it ever really on the Hatton undercard? Sky Sports, the premier provided of live boxing coverage in the UK are still (September 22nd) promoting the bout as being the lead feature on the Hatton v Stewart undercard but Sports Network deny the fight was ever agreed for that date. Fans, for all the parties' subsequent attempts to clarify the situation, as usual, are left in the dark.

Andy Ayling of Sport Network stated quite categorically:

"This fight has never, despite Board circulars, been on the MEN bill. This is a fact. James Hare was due to fight on the undercard in an eight rounder but has now, at his choice, been compensated as opposed to a having warm-up fight as the Barnes fight will happen sometime in November. The delay was caused due to Barnes being cleared by the Board following his

recent broken-arm and Tommy Gilmour, the fighter's manager, has been aware of the situation throughout.
There is no confusion!!"

True for those close to source, but what about the fans? Ayling's assertion continues to conflict with Sky's position on the fight and in addition to the British Boxing Board of Control circulars, published in early August which clearly stated:

"David Barnes (Holder) v James Hare
No purse offers were received for this contest but the Stewards are advised that terms have been agreed between the parties for this contest to take place at the MEN Arena, Manchester on 1st October 2004."

…Simon Block, General Secretary of the BBBofC, further clarified their view of the fight and its timing and status in a letter to me today:

"… I would advise that agreement was reached between the Promoter and Manager of Champion Barnes and the Manager of challenger Hare for this mandatory defence ordered by the Stewards of the Board to take place in Manchester on 1st October 2004.

The Promoter Frank Warren has advised that he now has some difficulty in putting that contest on at that date and agreement has been reached with the Manager of Hare, Tommy Gilmour, for this to be put back to 12th November 2004. The Stewards of the Board originally determined that this contest should take place by the end of October 2004 and my Chairman agrees that it would be nonsensical to disqualify the agreement for the sake of an extension of 12 days.

Those are the simple and basic facts of this matter and I am certainly looking forward to what on paper appears to be one of the best matchings in British boxing of this year."

Nobody disagrees with that. Hare v Barnes is a must see fight but why the denial from Sports Network? Postponements and date changes are hardly new, Hare's camp are on-board and the BBBofC supporting the extension. So what's the problem? Is Sports Network concerned people may have purchased tickets on the premise that Hare v Barnes would feature?

Or were they right and the BBBofC, SKY Sports and James Hare wrong?

Tommy Gilmour Jnr., James Hare's manager and promoter, was happy to update the situation and attempt to draw a line under the confusing episode.

Was the fight ever on the Ricky Hatton undercard?

"It was a possibility, but I think sensibly, Sports Network considered the bout a stand-alone contest. And we're happy with that; Ricky's is a huge and popular boy up there in Manchester. We're happy because I've managed to negotiate for James to receive the same purse for the revised date despite it not being an MEN fight. Which means we can be the main event, we

don't have to play second fiddle to anyone and we can hopefully maximise the exposure for James."

James Hare and Chris Aston (Hare's trainer) tell me the fight is likely to take place on November 12th?

"We're waiting on confirmation but yes that's right and at a venue of Sports Network's choosing."

It's been confusing for the fans hoping or expecting to see the fight on the Hatton undercard?

"There is no confusion, David Barnes is returning from an injury and the fight deserves both boys to be the fittest they can be."

Andy Ayling contacted me, suggesting Hare was only ever offered the chance to box an 8 round tune up?

"That was another option but I didn't think it was worth the risk six weeks ahead of a title clash, so Andy and I have it all sorted because as I say we're happy that we're getting exactly what we wanted, the same deal even though its not at the MEN."

Of course, there is a need to push ahead with the match up because the Harry Dhami v Jimmy Vincent eliminator takes place in November, and a situation where a guy, is waiting on a guy, who's…

(Interrupts) *"Yes, Dhami and Vincent box in November, on the 15th, but James would have no obligation to the winner, he'd have six months grace before that fight had to be made, we could make a voluntary during that time."*

To conclude, only one thing really matters and that's the British Boxing fan has the opportunity to see Hare v Barnes in the ring. And for all the doubters and sceptics, have a little faith; these guys want the best fights too.