

Is Boxing A Race Card?

Written by Deon Potgieter
Sunday, 23 January 2005 18:00

A key point raised for discussion at the upcoming South African boxing convention is that of color—skin color.

Boxing South Africa Chairman, Mthobi Tyamzashe earlier this week suggested the declining numbers of white boxers in South Africa is contributing to the decline of the sport. At present there are less than 10 notable white professional boxers in the country and many of those—the likes of Corrie Sanders, Anton Nel, Sebastian Rothman and Andre Thyse—are at the tail end of their careers.

Tyamzashe raised the point that black vs white encounters were always popular events and felt that if more whites could be attracted to boxing it would encourage more sponsors to the sport, which has declined steadily to the point where boxing is no longer one of the nation's most popular sports. Just over a decade ago boxing was the third most popular sport in a sport-mad nation. Professional wrestling now features as fourth on the most popular list, behind cricket, rugby and soccer.

While Tyamzashe's comments are interesting, they are perhaps a vain attempt to simplify the reasons the sport has crumbled, and I do not believe it can be laid at the door of the lack of white boxers. The boxers are of course a vital element, but surely marketing, managing and promoting skills are the problems here, and perhaps the reasons why white boxers are no longer coming to the fore should be researched. Have channels closed, or is inept administration deterring those who may have considered a pugilistic career?

Another factor which is often forgotten is that for over a century boxing has been one of the only professional sports available to South Africans, and purses were more lucrative a decade ago. Suddenly a whole world of sport opportunities have opened, many far more lucrative than getting your face smashed in for a few bucks.

So while the lack of white boxers in South Africa is a concern, it is merely the tip of an iceberg when it comes to resolving and reclaiming the status boxing once enjoyed. While those in the ring may be predominantly black, spectators and boxing lovers are of all colors. The fact that a race card has even been raised is out of line.

The question shouldn't be "how do we attract more white boxers?" It should be "how do we run boxing more effectively so that we can attract the best boxers out there, irrespective of race, color or creed."

It's insulting to say there is a differentiation. The sport is also battling to attract quality black boxers, so the problem stretches across the board.