

Lampley Lightweight On HBO Boxing

Written by Scott Yaniga
Monday, 24 January 2005 18:00

Prizefighting is a serious business. At times, it is a deadly business. That is why Jim Lampley's behavior during last weekend's HBO broadcast of the Floyd Mayweather, Jr.-Henry Bruseles bout was reprehensible at best and reckless at worst.

As Floyd—displaying all of the ring prowess that has vaulted him into lead of the best pound-for-pound fighters in the world today—was in the process of walking through the hand-picked Bruseles, whose lack of competitive skills this night was matched only by his courage, Lampley took time away from the coverage of the bout to talk football with expert commentator Roy Jones, Jr. It took place during the seventh round, a session that saw the outgunned Bruseles manage to score an even round on unofficial ringside arbiter Harold Lederman's card.

Once Jones gave his pick for a winner in the Patriots-Steelers divisional championship, Lampley made a point of telling Jones that, "I ask you (Jones) the question and Floyd looks here and says, 'The Patriots.'" The sense of awe in Lampley was such that you would have thought Mayweather had broken the DaVinci Code.

In fact, so taken was Lampley with this bit of witty, non-boxing related banter that he continued on, ignoring the sight of an overmatched Bruseles actually holding his own this particular round. He went on to solicit Jones' pick on the Eagles-Falcons game, then remarked that he would have to wait until Mayweather came to Lampley's side of the ring to get his opinion on the gridiron tilt, adding, "...we know he's already picked the Patriots...while in the middle of punching Henry Bruseles." A clearly gaga Lampley then giddily informed the HBO home audience that "Between rounds we will show you—on replay—the moment when Floyd Mayweather, answering my question to Roy Jones, picked the Patriots to win tomorrow." The clip was following by some smug chuckling from both Lampley and Jones.

The only counterbalance to this moronic interplay was Larry Merchant's acerbic observations that, despite Mayweather's "virtuoso performance" on this night, Bruseles was chosen as an opponent by Mayweather and his management only after they bypassed several top contenders at 140 pounds. He also punctured Roy Jones' ego by rejoining to a Jones comment that the Falcons' Michael Vick "is the Roy Jones of the game" with: "He might get knocked out, Roy."

Round eight saw Lampley further engage in the same sort of witless, self-serving nonsense by waiting until the fighters maneuvered over to this position so he could shout, "Eagles or Falcons, Floyd?" After Mayweather delivered his pick to a practically breathless Lampley, even the buzzed-cut, aging frat boy himself acknowledged that "I've gotta stop this so that I don't distract him. It's too easy."

Lampley, long the lightweight among the HBO crew of talking heads, has marked his career with a history of front-running in his commentary during bouts, continuing to hype his network's contracted star fighters—whether or not they are actually in the lead, or in control of the fight in

Lampley Lightweight On HBO Boxing

Written by Scott Yaniga

Monday, 24 January 2005 18:00

front of him—much to the chagrin of many boxing fans and media types. He has slavishly devoted himself to the fistic heroes of the HBO universe, whether it was tacitly countenancing the ridiculous ring entrances of Naseem Hamed or glorifying the showboating buffoonery of a Camacho, Jones, Jr., Judah or Mayweather, Jr., his lack of critical, objective commentary was made even more glaring by Larry Merchant's cynical and caustic rejoinders to such boorish behavior over the years.

Now that Mayweather has dispatched the game Bruseles, and assuming that Arturo Gatti gets by the faded Jesse James Leija next weekend, it is likely that Floyd and Arturo will get together sometime later this year in a battle for Arturo's piece of the 140-pound title. It will be interesting to see if Lampley will dare to belittle Gatti's skills and effort against Mayweather, as he did to Bruseles, should Floyd overwhelm him with his speed and punching accuracy, as many feel likely to happen. Gatti is one of the long-time stars in the HBO Sports galaxy; Bruseles was a virtual unknown quantity among the upper echelon of the super lightweight division. Gatti doesn't take a backwards step in his fights, and Bruseles didn't either in his quixotic loss to the vastly superior Mayweather, Jr., and deserves no less consideration for his efforts than a marquee type as a Gatti.

Lampley diminished only himself, fortunately, with his boorish, unprofessional conduct during the Mayweather-Bruseles broadcast. Fighters—even losing fighters—themselves offer boxing the only dignity sometimes available to what has turned into the poor stepchild of American sports. It is uncalled for and undeserved for even the most modestly skilled fighter to have his performance marginalized or outright ignored by the type of self-indulgent claptrap that Lampley chooses to engage in during fight broadcasts.

For Lampley, who has never taken a punch for pay and who cowered like a blushing schoolgirl behind fellow commentator George Foreman during the 1996 riot that followed the Bowe-Golota disqualification bout at Madison Square Garden, it is apparent that the line between sports and entertainment is fatally blurred in his mind. Maybe he should let his good pal Pretty Boy Floyd tee off with a couple of shots to his mush or ribcage so he could see what all the fun and games are about in between the ropes. It would make for an entertaining segment during the next HBO broadcast

Well, for Henry Bruseles it might, anyhow.