

Boxing Is All About The Drama

Written by Marc Lichtenfeld
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“Now, what’s the reason for the drama?” – 3rd Bass

People who don’t know me well are always astonished that I’m a boxing junkie. “Why boxing?” they ask incredulously. I explain to them that behind all of the mismatches, rigged ratings and alphabet champions lies the most dramatic sport there is. Hollywood recognized this decades ago, which is why there are more great films about boxing than any other sport. Golf is a fun game, but how many great golf movies are there? “Caddyshack” is the only one I can think of.

There’s a lot more at stake in boxing than just a W or an L. The loser doesn’t just go home with a dented ego. He sometimes exits with a banged up melon, or a face full of holes. There’s a lot more on the line than just a trophy.

But it’s not simply the consequences that make the contests so dramatic; it’s the way they conclude. Professional boxing matches usually end one of two ways – in an especially violent fashion in which one man is unable (or deemed unable) to continue, or by a decision. Ah, the decision.

One of boxing’s black eyes is the sometimes ludicrous scoring by the judges. Every boxing fan can think of a fight that he considers the biggest robbery of all time. Unfortunately, every year contains some horrendous decisions. One only has to think back to the Dale Brown – O’Neill Bell fight a few weeks ago for a recent example. But the decision and possibility of some unusual scorecards also add to the drama of boxing.

In just about every other sport, when the contest is over you know who won. Even in competitions like figure skating, gymnastics, or diving, which have subjective scoring by judges, there is a leader board and it is known what score is necessary to win.

Boxing, thankfully, doesn’t have that. An attempt was made a few years ago to post the judges’ scores, but it wasn’t received well. A boxer who knows he’s three points ahead on the cards will probably not fight a very entertaining final round. How many football games have we turned off when the winning team goes into the prevent defense in the 4th quarter (didn’t exactly work for De La Hoya against Trinidad, did it)? I’m a huge fan of baseball, but an 8-0 game usually has me reaching for the remote. Not so in the sweet science. A guy can be pitching a shutout over ten rounds, but I know I want to hear the decision to make damn sure the right guy won.

The decision in a close fight is the height of drama in professional sports as far as I’m concerned. I’ve felt this way for a long time, but I was reminded of it in a somewhat personal way recently.

Last week, I was the ring announcer on ESPN2’s Friday Night Fights. The main event between Kendall Holt and Jamie Rangel ended up as a twelve round split decision. Most people thought Holt won, but Rangel put up enough of a fight to make it close. And considering the Brown –

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Bell decision took place just a few miles up the road, who knew what to expect?

As I read the decision, the Holt camp was immediately to my right – close enough to touch if I reached out my arm. After the last score, but before I announced the winner, I paused (for dramatic effect). I hadn't even finished saying the word "Kendall" when Holt and his handlers joyously erupted. It was an important win for Holt. He won some belt (I know what it is but don't want to validate the sanctioning organization) and moved his record to 19-1. A loss would have been a major step backwards, one that would likely take no less than a year to come back from in terms of his career. At the very least, he probably wouldn't appear on ESPN again anytime soon.

Being so close, I physically felt Holt and Co.'s energy as I announced the winner. I've been around boxing for a few years now and I can tell you it was unlike anything I'd experienced before. That small section of the ring where I was standing held so much tension. But with the utterance of one word - "Kendall" - the anxiety was instantly replaced with pure ecstasy. It felt quicker than the flick of a switch. It was the payoff that most in the building were looking for.

All sports have drama. That's what keeps us going back for more. But the drama of a spectacular knockout, a furious combination that prompts a TKO, or the announcement of a close decision is unparalleled in any other sport.

So the next time someone asks you why you're such a big boxing fan, tell them "It's all about the drama."

Jabs

- I love a slugfest as much as the next guy, but I also like to watch intelligent boxing. Israel Vazquez did a superb job in changing his game plan and saving his title against Armando Guerrero (although I had Guerrero narrowly winning on my scorecard). Let's hope Guerrero gets another shot. He deserves it.
- The crew that puts together the Friday Night Fights broadcast is terrific. They are extremely professional, easy to work with, and appear to enjoy what they're doing. Joe Tessitore has quickly become one of the best at calling a fight.
- I have always liked Antonio Tarver and think he is an excellent boxer. However, it is extremely difficult to root against Glen Johnson. Anyone who has ever met him would probably agree. It's a lot of fun to see him getting his due and interacting with the crowd at local events. He always has time for everyone, signing autographs, posing for pictures, etc. And he surrounds himself with decent people as well. Nothing against the Magic Man, but go get 'em Glen.