

A Few More Rounds

Written by Tim Graham
Monday, 06 June 2005 19:00

Ricky Hatton has guaranteed himself boxing immortality.

One big upset victory is all it takes in Great Britain, but I don't think Hatton will turn out to be some one-hit wonder.

Hatton made one of the greatest fighters of the past decade quit Saturday night when he stripped Kostya Tszyu of the IBF junior welterweight crown after 11 rugged rounds in Manchester, sending 22,000 fans into euphoria.

True, it was Tszyu's trainer, Johnny Lewis, who nudged his charge to give up. Yet if Tszyu wanted to continue badly enough, then he would've.

He clearly didn't want the assault to go on.

"After the 11th I asked him again if he was OK," Lewis said, "and he said 'Yes.' But I told him I was stopping the fight because he was getting hit too much, and he didn't respond."

Hatton beat the desire out of Tszyu, and because of that he will be a British hero forever. The Hitman also probably assured his place in the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Some might view that as a knee-jerk anointment, but the fact of the matter is that Hatton is only 26 years old and already owns a sparkling 39-0 record with 29 KOs. He's coming off a significant upset over a warrior who was at the top of everyone's pound-for-pound list, and he's certain to solidify his U.S. presence with some big-money bouts on this side of the pond.

Showtime is salivating over Hatton's stateside potential. Showtime executive Jay Larkin would love to put the relentless brawler in Madison Square Garden either with unified lightweight champ Diego Corrales or WBO junior welterweight champ Miguel Cotto. Other potential blockbusters include WBC champ Arturo Gatti or top contender Floyd Mayweather, regardless of who wins that showdown June 25 in Atlantic City.

Hatton's legacy hinged on Saturday's match. Even many of his countrymen viewed him as a protected pug who might be more hype than substance, feasting on a string of pedestrian foes or noble veterans past their primes. If Tszyu beat him as most expected, it would have confirmed the notion Hatton had been nothing more than an entertainer with an inflated record.

The decisive victory, however, validated Hatton's worth and vaulted him to grand heights.

He was brazen, unfazed by Tszyu's power or track record. There was nary a shred of intimidation in Hatton's body. He took the best Tszyu had to offer and broke his will with an unyielding attack.

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"Hopefully now I can do the title proud, and in a few years' time Kostya can say he lost his title to a great champion," Hatton said.

Ricky, I have a feeling you'll do just fine.

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A REAL IBA-RRASSMENT: Just a few years ago, Bob Arum heralded the International Boxing Association as a potential savior of the sport.

But the IBA is about as close to relevancy these days as Butterbean, Mia St. John or Julio Cesar Chavez.

Of the IBA's 17 weight classes, 13 are without champions, according to its website. The listed champs are heavyweight James Toney (suspended for steroids), light heavyweight Roy Jones Jr. (two straight losses by devastating KOs), middleweight Fulgencio Zuniga (I'm sure Bernard Hopkins is concerned) and junior welterweight Rogelio Castaneda (7-8-2 in his past 17 outings).

Even more disturbing is the IBA recently sanctioned a title bout between Craig Weber and Frankie Randall in something the organization calls its Legends Series. This bad excuse for sport is scheduled for July 15 in Cleveland.

Weber, a 30-year-old with a 19-1-2 record, certainly doesn't qualify as a legend. But the real troubling aspect of this bout is that Randall is being approved at all.

Randall, a 43-year-old with a history of drug abuse, is 3-10 with nine knockout losses in the past 4½ years. He has dropped four fights in a row, three by KO. Two of his victories were six-round decisions, and one of those was a split on the scorecards. His other win occurred when Fernando Hernandez was disqualified for low blows.

I'm ashamed to say my native state of Ohio, which has one of the weakest commissions in the union, is willing to let this fiasco transpire. The IBA, founded by former Cy Young Award winner and carnival maven Dean Chance, is based in the Buckeye State.

MAYBE D-CON COULD GET RID OF HIM: There's talk of Chavez headlining an Arizona farewell fight against Jorge Paez. Let's see, that means he'll be coming through New York somewhere around August 2009.

I DON'T GET IT: Some subjects apparently are just beyond my realm of comprehension. I think I've experienced a few moments of clarity in trying grasp the theory of relativity, but one thing has always mystified me.

For years boxing memorabilia dealer Bob Pace, based in Lynnfield, Mass., has taken out one-page advertisements in The Ring, KO and other publications. He has some wonderful items: fight posters and programs, autographs, photos -- everything a boxing collector could want.

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But every time I come across his price list, I'm perplexed.

I was a former diehard sports collector from middle school through my mid-20s, and I helped establish myself financially upon graduating from college by renting out tables to sell items at memorabilia shows.

So I understand how the autograph market works. It's simple supply and demand. What makes an autograph valuable is either desirability or limited availability. When you have both, it becomes a highly coveted signature.

Based on that, Pace's ad in the August 2005 edition of The Ring had me scratching my head.

How in the world does a signed 8x10 of Dana Rosenblatt sell for the same \$15 you would pay to get one autographed by Emile Griffith? For \$45 you can have a signed photo of either Larry Holmes or Andrew Golota. Which would you take?

How does an autographed Fernando Vargas glove go for \$175, same as a glove signed by Willie Pep or Kid Gavilan (who, by the way, happens to be dead, creating the ultimate limited edition)? Or fetch \$50 more than one signed by Alexis Arguello?

A signed Vinny Pazienza glove sells for \$100. But a Vinny Paz autographed glove is only \$75. I suppose the extra "ienza" brings a premium.

Now, this isn't just a Pace phenomenon. In my various travels around the country I make it a point to step into any sports or Hollywood memorabilia shops I encounter. I can't tell you how many times I've seen an autographed baseball from somebody with one All-Star appearance going for twice as much as one signed by a Hall of Famer.

And please don't think I'm questioning Pace's integrity. Quite the contrary. Some of his prices seem bargain-basement, and there are a few items in his inventory I'd love to add to my collection. I'm sure his Griffith-signed 8x10s won't remain in stock very long at \$15, especially not after "Ring of Fire." The only reason I bring Pace up here is because he's probably the most prolific boxing collectibles dealer out there.

You can visit his website at www.BobPaceBoxing.com . Pick up something nice to hang in the rumpus room, or just look at the catalog and scratch your head.

BOYS WILL BE BOYS: Here's a champion I can relate to.

Scott Harrison, the Scotsman who defended his WBO featherweight belt Friday night by battering Michael Brodie into retirement, is banned from every drinking establishment in East Kilbride, Lanarkshire, after a series of untoward incidents.

Harrison has been barred since April from entering any pub, nightclub or hotel for six months. The fighter has threatened to move to Spain because of media scrutiny for such antics as throwing bar stools, refusing to pay tabs and lighting cigars with 10-pound notes. He was

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acquitted last year of beating up a man in a pub restroom, but in March was convicted of resisting arrest after a dispute with a cabbie.

Reminds me of the night I got tossed from Faherty's here in Buffalo. And, yes, it was worth it.

BURNING QUESTIONS: How much money must a man possess to not care that he's known as a douche bag? A few more people would like to ask Jose Sulaiman that question given the WBC's decision to (a) strip Javier Castillejo of its super welterweight title for not fighting propped up mandatory Ricardo Mayorga and (b) play the race card with Main Events, who had arranged for a legit Fernando Vargas-Castillejo match.

Why can't the videogame industry create a boxing series that's worth a damn? Eighteen years have passed since "Mike Tyson's Punch-Out" was released, and no one has made a better game. Little Mac, come back!

Did Showtime consider using an interpreter to help us understand what the hell was being said in Scott Harrison's corner Friday night?

What's more pathetic than the jokers who jockey for face time behind a fighter who's getting interviewed in the ring? I love the guys on their cell phones, presumably telling someone back home "Look, I'm on TV!" Whoop de do.

MORON OF THE WEEK: Top 132-pound U.S. amateur Michael Evans was arrested on felony drug charges less than two weeks after he won the national Golden Gloves title.

He allegedly sold crack cocaine to a police informant in Dayton, Ohio. Evans, 27, won his first of four major national championships in 1998.

Dude, if you need the money that bad, turn pro.

QUOTEMARKS: "(Barry) McGuigan beat (Eusebio) Pedroza, John H Stracey beat Jose Napoles and Nigel Benn beat Gerald McClellan. I think you are going to be adding me to that list, and just the fact that I could be mentioned with names like them, you are talking about end-of-the-rainbow stuff." -- Ricky Hatton before facing Kostya Tszyu

"Sometimes, I hear somebody yell 'Hey, I want the old Mike back.' No, you don't. Nobody wants that guy back. I don't want him back." -- Mike Tyson in Sunday's *Arizona Republic*

"I think the first three or four rounds will tell the fight. If (McBride) is still there for the fourth round he stands a chance. He has power, and his size and weight will weigh on Tyson after a while, but Tyson's a bull for the first three." -- Kevin McBride sparring partner Terrence Lewis to the *Boston Herald*.