

“Million Dollar Lady” Goes Broke

Written by Joey Knish
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In case you haven't heard, the “Million Dollar Lady” showdown between Lucia Rijker and Christy Martin is now officially off. In case you cared, read on.

The bout scheduled for July 30th at the Mandalay Bay Events Center was supposed to be part of a pay-per-view broadcast headlined with the ladies' battle for \$1 million. As I understand the purse breakdown, each fighter was to earn \$250,000, with the winner laying claim to another \$750,000. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on your take on women's boxing, the proposed bout never did capitalize on the box office and Academy Awards hit movie “Million Dollar Baby.”

Rumors had been swirling around that somewhere in the neighborhood of 500 tickets had been sold and the event had the making of a financial disaster. Go figure.

Still, the show was to go on, at least until this week when “The Dutch Destroyer” Rijker injured her Achilles tendon while training, prompting the cancellation of the event. Once Rijker heals one has to wonder if the fight will be back on as planned, if it takes place as the headliner of a non-PPV bout, or if it happens at all. While watching the bout might have been an interesting idea, paying to see the two do battle left little to be desired.

Christy Martin, “The Coalminer's Daughter,” is 46-3-2 (31 KOs) as a professional boxer, fighting mostly in the 144-pound range of late. She stepped up over her head and in weight (to 159 pounds) to lose by fourth round knockout against Laila Ali in 2003, didn't fight in 2004, and has fought one time this year. While the 37-year-old Martin isn't pretty, she is tough and has decent skills and has gained some following due to her high number of appearances, occasionally appearing on ESPN broadcasts.

Rijker, on the other hand, has done little to build a following other than running her professional record to 17-0 with 14 knockouts. Also 37 years of age, she hasn't fought many “name” opponents other than Jane Couch (25-7), and only fans of female boxing know of Couch. While it is true that Rijker “acted” the role of rough-and-tumble Billy “The Blue Bear” in the “Million Dollar Baby” movie (no offense to any real actors out there), it was one of the rare times anyone had seen her in a ring for some time. An Amsterdam native, Rijker has not been in a fight yet this year, fought just once in 2004, one time in 2003, once again in 2002, and did not have a single bout in neither 2001 nor 2000.

There is no doubting that the injury suffered by Lucia Rijker is legitimate, but on the positive note it may have saved the promoters in the end. Apparently Rijker heard a “pop” followed by a sharp pain while training. She has since been seen on crutches and was scheduled for surgery later in the week. While it looks like she will be off for up to six months, the bigger question is if she will fight again. At her age and with the recent run of inactivity the injury may be one she never comes back from ... if she even wants to.

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For Lucia Rijker the lure of a \$1 million payday for a victory may be too much to pass up. However, and unfortunately for both Martin and Rijker, the boxing public has had no problem passing up the opportunity to hand over their hard-earned money to watch the two women fight.