

Boxing Ain't Finer in Carolina

Written by Marc Lichtenfeld
Monday, 08 August 2005 19:00

*"Nothing could be finer
Than to be in Carolina
In the Morning" – Gus Kahn*

It may be fine to be in Carolina in the morning, but from a boxing perspective, it was a disgrace on the evening of July 28th.

As I was scrolling through the news, I thought I must have come across a few typos when I read that William Joppy, the former middleweight champion of the world, stopped Rashan Blackburn in the 3rd round. Going into the fight, Joppy was 34-4-1 with 25 KOs. His four losses were against Bernard Hopkins, Jermain Taylor, Felix Trinidad and Julio Cesar Green – three elite fighters and another who was no doubt world-class. Blackburn's record was 8-34-2 with 4 KOs. At the time, Blackburn had lost five of his last six and fourteen of his last seventeen (1 win, 1 draw and 1 no contest). Joppy was less than two years from being a world champion.

On the undercard DeMarcus "Chop Chop" Corley (30-4-1, 16 KOs) faced Kevin Carter (9-45-1, 2 KOs). Three of Corley's 4 losses were against Miguel Cotto, Floyd Mayweather, Jr. and Zab Judah – three of the best fighters in the world.

Not surprisingly, Joppy decimated his opponent, finishing him in three rounds. Carter, who is known for being durable, went the eight round distance with Corley, although the fight wasn't much of a contest.

The question has to be asked, how did the South Carolina Athletic Commission give the green light to these fights, when neither opponent would qualify as a sparring partner for the world-class boxers that they faced that night?

When the New York Yankees face off against the University of Tampa's baseball team – it doesn't count. It's an exhibition.

In baseball, when the Yankees play an exhibition against the University of Tampa, it's kind of cute. You know that the college kids are getting the thrill of a lifetime – one that they'll tell their grandchildren about some day. They don't have to worry that Randy Johnson is going to stick one in their ear if they crowd the plate, or that A-Rod is going to slide into second with his spikes high.

Boxing isn't like other sports. When there is a gross mismatch, the dominant fighter is going to try to hurt his opponent as quickly as he can in order to make it a short night (and minimize the risk to his own health). Perhaps someday Blackburn will regale his grandchildren with stories of his boxing days, including the time he stepped in with William Joppy, who at one time was one of the best in the world. But when boxers are matched so inappropriately and take unnecessary beatings, it's more likely that they won't recognize their grandchildren to tell them the Joppy-like

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stories.

I phoned Randy Bryant, Assistant Deputy Director at the South Carolina Athletic Commission. Jim Knight, Director of Communications and Governmental Affairs for the South Carolina Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation returned my call. Mr. Knight was eager to be helpful, but was not exactly the biggest boxing connoisseur in the world (he consistently referred to William Joppy as "Mr. Jopley").

The spokesman told me that yes, the Commission did take the boxers' records under consideration when approving the fights, but both Corley and "Jopley" had been inactive while Carter and Blackburn had a lot of recent bouts. No argument there. Prior to the Blackburn fight, "Jopley" fought only twice in the past two years – losing both, to guys named Jermain Taylor and Bernard Hopkins. Blackburn had fought three times already in 2005, winning one and getting stopped twice.

Knight also pointed out that Corley had limited action in the last year (a win and a loss) and "in fact was TKO'd in his last fight." True, Corley was "stopped" in his bout against Miguel Cotto. But anyone who knows anything about boxing is aware of what a horrible stoppage that was, that Corley had Cotto out on his feet at one point, and that Corley was not hurt when he took a knee to get a few seconds of respite.

Knight added that the Commission was, "disappointed in Blackburn's performance" and that his showing, "will be taken under review." Disappointed in his performance? What did they expect? I think the guy should get a medal for lasting three rounds.

Mismatches are an unfortunate part of the sport. I understand the need to protect a young fighter – get him some experience and confidence as he moves up the ladder. In fact, there's no reason to put a guy who is 5-0 in a life and death struggle early in his career. But I have seen fights in which the opponent had no business being in the ring.

The worst mismatch I've seen involved Lou Duva's young heavyweight prospect Mike Marrone. Last year he took on a "boxer" making his pro debut who had the strangely common name of Mike Johnson. It looked like they may have plucked Mr. Johnson from the bar earlier that evening. We only got to watch Johnson for 45 seconds, but it looked like he had never seen a pair of boxing gloves in his life. Johnson flew across the ring twice after Marrone grazed him. The out of shape Johnson never fought again (thankfully).

The situation in South Carolina wasn't as bad as the above example. Carter and Blackburn certainly know their way around the ring after nearly 100 fights between the two of them. But considering their combined 17% win percentage, perhaps the Commission should take a closer look at the matches being fought under their auspices.

There's something boxing fans can do to help these situations. I am a big supporter of club shows. The fights are often exciting, you get great seats, and the athletes are very accessible (making it a great activity for kids). I try to go to as many of the club shows in my area as I can, both for professional reasons, but also to support the promoters and the sport. But boxing fans,

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if you see a gross mismatch as the main event of a local show – one where you know the fight won't last more than a couple of rounds – don't spend your money. Let the promoter know that you want to attend his shows, but you're not going to pay for that garbage. Boxing, like any other commodity, is influenced by supply and demand. If promoters are forced to put on decent shows, inept commissions like the one in South Carolina won't have to make bad decisions, like the one last month.

Jabs

- O'Neil Bell defends his IBF title against Sebastian Rothmann on August 26th in a pay-per-view event. Huh? First of all, why wasn't he forced to fight a rematch with Dale Brown? Brown easily won that fight but somehow Bell ended up with the belt around his waist.
- The supporting bouts – Ray Mercer vs. Shannon Briggs – would have been a great fight ten years ago. Now, who cares? I'm surprised Warriors Boxing will even allow Mercer on their premises after he abruptly "retired" a week before his fight with DaVarryl Williamson last year, in order to make more money fighting in a K-1 competition.
- David Tua, Jameel McCline and Lance Whitaker will also be in action against no-names. I can't think of a card that I would be less interested in shelling out \$30 bucks for ... Oh wait, Joppy-Blackburn and Corley-Carter.