

A Few More Rounds

Written by Tim Graham
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So this is what we're left with in the heavyweight division, borderline personalities teetering on the fringes of the upper echelon.

We're in an era where Hasim Rahman and Monte Barrett qualify as some sort of marquee matchup – on pay-per-view, no less.

But what else is there? Can anyone drum up a dream matchup that would create even a modicum of mainstream buzz?

I mean, really. Rahman is a perennial contender and Barrett has been considered a second-tier entity for years. Sadly, they're among the most intriguing names out there.

The four champions – Vitali Klitschko, Chris Byrd, John Ruiz, Lamon Brewster – each are one bad loss away from sunset. It's a sad state when a substantial chunk of boxing fans wouldn't mind if a few of them completely disappeared from the scene. They refuse to fight each other, choosing instead to take turns on Andrew Golota.

There aren't any prizes in the next grouping of heavyweights either.

Steroids will forever stigmatize James Toney. Wladimir Klitschko will never improve above damaged-goods status. Samuel Peter has more flaws than a finger-painted Van Gogh reproduction. David Tua is off the radar. Joe Mesi, if he's ever cleared to fight, won't be able to overcome the layoff even if he can learn how to dodge a power shot.

Then you get to the Shannon Briggses and DaVarryl Williamsons and Jameel McClines and Dominick Guinns and Owen Becks and Calvin Brocks and Luan Krasniqis.

Once you get to those guys, what's the point? Don't tell me Oleg Maskaev and Kirk Johnson are on the cusp.

The last major heavyweight fight was when Lennox Lewis knocked out Mike Tyson three years ago.

That leaves us with bouts like Rahman versus Barrett, a matchup tantamount to giving a morsel of food to a starving man.

We'll take it, and we'll be thankful. But it won't sustain us.

Rahman is one of the few who can make the division interesting again, but there are too many caveats. The man who once landed a lottery punch and knocked out Lewis to become undisputed champ can return to prominence if: he scores a decisive victory over Barrett on Saturday night in Chicago; finally lands a bout with the perpetually injured Vitali Klitschko and

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wins; and unifies at least a couple of the major belts, something that hasn't been done since Lewis.

Maybe, just maybe, all that will be enough to capture the casual fan's interest.

"I obviously want Klitschko, but Monte is first, and I have to look impressive to get that far," Rahman said.

Barrett is on an admirable run over the past five years, dating back to his knockout loss against Wladimir Klitschko. Barrett has since gone 8-1, with his lone blemish a unanimous decision loss to Mesi. Barrett's last two victories were upsets over Guinn and Beck, prospects who entered those fights with 24-0 records.

But Rahman should handle the overachieving Barrett this weekend. Rahman is too big, too strong and too experienced in big fights. All reports say he's in wonderful shape under the tutelage of trainer Thell Torrance. Rahman should handle the slow-starting Barrett with the jab and rack up enough rounds to notch a comfortable decision.

And when this fight is over, how much closer will we be to sorting out the heavyweight morass?

Not very.

"It's time to set up a heavyweight tournament and get an undisputed champion," Rahman said. "The winner will be the ultimate champion, and the fans will follow him.

"Right now, it's just so confusing."

Right now, and for the imaginable future.

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LET IT GO: One of the most basic rules of charity – taught to me, believe it or not, by George Steinbrenner during an interview many years ago – is that it should be done anonymously. Otherwise, you come off as an attention monger.

Jermain Taylor's promoter, Lou DiBella, defied multiple tenets of charity Tuesday with a news release proclaiming the new middleweight champ was donating autographed gloves and trunks to the American Cancer Society for a fundraiser.

The statement further explained Taylor was doing so because Bernard Hopkins had withdrawn his pledge to donate similar items at the request of *The Ring* as retribution for the magazine refusing to continue recognizing Hopkins as its champion.

The well-chronicled rivalry between DiBella and Hopkins should have ended when Taylor defeated Hopkins. Sure, Hopkins was being boorish when he refused to make the donation, but to rub his nose in it publicly and use such a platform – and the American Cancer Society – as a

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means of making your fighter look good sure does come off as petty.

Please, move on.

LEGITIMACY OR BUST: On my list of boxing's biggest jokes, Mia St. John always held a spot near the bottom among names such as Butterbean, Peter McNeeley and Johnny Bos' wardrobe.

I rolled my eyes when I recently saw her – in all her unathletic splendor – on the Game Show Network's "Extreme Dodgeball." I could only feel sorry for the team that drew her as its celebrity player, while other teams got the likes of NFL star Jeremiah Trotter, Olympic volleyball gold medalist Kerry Walsh or even Mario Lopez, the guy who played Slater on "Saved by the Bell."

But my admiration for St. John skyrocketed after reading Robert Morales' feature on her in the *Los Angeles Daily News* in which he bemoans the way former promoter Bob Arum marketed her as little more than a piece of pugilistic ass.

St. John, 38, is a powder puff in terms of boxing skill, yet based on her comments it sure sounds as though her heart, unlike her breasts, is real.

"One of the downfalls with Bob Arum was that he would tell me, 'I can't let you (fight Christy Martin), you'll get killed,'" St. John told Morales. "I knew that fight with Martin was something I had to do to prove to myself, and for me to know where I stood in boxing.

"Was I the best? Was I the worst? After fighting Christy Martin, I realized I was much better than my critics thought."

St. John nevertheless lost a lopsided unanimous decision to Martin when they fought in 2002, taking only three rounds on two of the scorecards and one round on the other.

But the fact that the Playboy cover girl aspired to test herself rather than remain content to be window dressing for Top Rank cards speaks volumes.

BURNING QUESTIONS: After watching Showtime's replay of the Diego Corrales-Jose Luis Castillo instant classic, can anyone really expect the rematch being that intense?

Of the following delusional, active boxers, who has the best chance of winning a title: Mitch "Blood" Green, Tony Tubbs, Oliver McCall or Thomas Hearn?

Hasn't the Butterbean "phenomenon" run its course yet?

Would Mike Tyson's rumored porno film debut generate more buys than his last pay-per-view?

MORON OF THE WEEK: Ron Siler already had received a glorious second chance at life because of boxing. Now he just has to learn when and whom to stop punching, namely his

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spouse.

Siler, released from his 17-month sentence in a Dayton, Ohio, prison so he could train for and compete in the 2004 Olympics at 112 pounds, is facing domestic assault charges. Alexiss Wooten, referred to in police reports as his spouse, filed charges against him and applied for a restraining order last month.

Cincinnati Post reporter Josh Katzowitz wrote that Siler had pleaded guilty to assault during a 2002 donnybrook at a time he was on probation for receiving stolen property. Local politicians and boxing coaches lobbied for his release. He went on to win three major national amateur titles in 2004 before getting eliminated in the second round in Athens.

Siler was supposed to make his pro debut next week in San Jose on a card with U.S. Olympic teammates Andre Ward, Andre Dirrell and Devin Vargas. Promoter Dan Goossen has axed Siler from the show.

QUOTEMARKS: "The tapes show me that he has no strategy and he is very stupid when he fights. And he's really shown his stupidity by taking this fight with me." – Ricardo Mayorga on Saturday's opponent, Michele Piccirillo, for the vacant WBC super middleweight title

"This fight is my final test. If I don't beat Collazo, then I am out of boxing for good." –Miguel Angel Gonzalez on Saturday's fight with WBC welterweight champ Luis Collazo

"If I can't beat the likes of Jeff Lacy then I should pack up and retire. I have the style to destroy Lacy. With my hand speed he would not know where the punches were coming from ... I can change my style and give him nightmares.' – WBO super middleweight champ Joe Calzaghe on his proposed Nov. 5 bout with IBF champ Jeff Lacy

"Because I'm one of them. I'm the man mowing his lawn across the street who pulls up his pants three times. I remind them of their uncle. Who wouldn't buy something from their relative?" – George Foreman to the *Chicago Sun-Times* on why the general public relates to him so well

"I told my mother and my wife that I will never box again. I told my wife that things will be different now. I feel sad because I like boxing, but I have to think of my family first." – former light flyweight Ruben Contreras, who sustained a coma-inducing brain injury against Brian Viloria in May