For the third time in one year, big-time boxing returned to Milan. Until the 1980s, Milan was the top boxing city in Italy. The famed Palalido was always packed. Some great fighters like Vito Antuofermo and Luigi Minchillo were so popular that fans used to stop them in the street. In the 1990s the downfall started: few cards were promoted and less and less spectators attended each show.

It all changed in 1996, when Giovanni Parisi sold out the Palalido (back then, it had a capacity of 4000) and forced the promoter to move to a bigger venue. But the renewed popularity of boxing didn't last long. Milan was abandoned for a few years and the Palalido became the heaven of kickboxing. Six companies promoted kickboxing shows and five of them were successful in drawing thousands of paying customers. Today, only two kickboxing promoters are still active and each one of them puts on one show a year. A new company debuted recently, but it didn't announce a second card. The problem is that kickboxing never made it to the big time. It has always been ignored by newspapers and that keeps it a niche sport. TV networks broadcast kickboxing only when the promoter buys the airtime (paying a fee per hour). Even ring sports magazines cover kickboxing only after somebody invests big money in publicity. This situation says it all about the difference between boxing and the other ring sports: kickboxing & co. are considered small-time entertainment and nobody wants to give them space for free; boxing is considered a serious sport, with a large fan base, and everybody is willing to cover it and sponsor it. That's why boxing is always able to come back after a crisis.

Gleason's Gym owner Bruce Silvergrade told me, many times: *Boxing is part of the human nature. It became a show when there were only three men on Earth: two were fighting, the third one was watching. It hasn't stopped ever since and it will never stop.*
Going back to the Milan's situation, we can legitimately say that boxing is back. That's thanks to Salvatore Cherchi and his contacts with the national TV networks, big sponsors, foreign promoters and top officials of the major sanctioning bodies who bring their world title fights to Italy. That's the main difference between the United States and Italy: in North America there are dozens of big promoters and countless small ones (it must be this way if 856 shows were promoted during 2003 in the U.S. and Canada); in Italy we have less than ten promoters in total and only one with international connections. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, there were four big promoters: Umberto Branchini, Rocco Agostino, Rodolfo Sabbatini and Renzo Spagnoli. It's not that way now. On December 16, some of the best Italian fighters showed up against easy opponents in keep busy fights while waiting for a shot at a major title.

Silvio Branco vs. Radek Seman – 6 rounds - Light Heavyweights

This was the main event because of Silvio Branco, one of the most successful Italian fighters of recent years. He won titles in three divisions. The list is so long that I'll just name his most important accomplishments: Italian and WBU middleweight champion, WBU super middleweight champion, and WBA light heavyweight champion. His record comprised 53 wins (33 KOs), 8 losses and 2 draws. On the other hand, Branco's opponent Radek Seman's record was 6 wins

and 11 losses. It looked like a mismatch on paper and it was a mismatch on canvas, with Branco knocking down Seman in the first round. In the second and third rounds, the fighters spent too much time clinching and not hitting properly. This caused the crowd to boo. It has to be said that there is a strong rivalry between Milan and Rome; Branco comes from Civitavecchia which is a coin toss from Rome. In the fourth stanza, Branco silenced the crowd by hitting Seman at will and forcing the referee to stop the fight.

Giacobbe Fragomeni vs. Zoltan Beres – 6 rounds - Cruiserweights

WBC international champion Giacobbe Fragomeni's record was 18-0, with 7 wins *coming by way of knockout*
(using Michael Buffer's favorite expression) and he was aiming at a world title shot against WBO champion Johnny Nelson. Zoltan Beres had a journeyman's record (27-27-2) and was just looking for a payday. So, it was easy to predict a Fragomeni win. The only doubt was if he could get it before the final bell. Fragomeni had the power to do it, but he told
The Sweet Science
before the fight that he wanted to go the six full rounds to keep improving. Fragomeni didn't need six rounds because he hurt Beres early. It should be said that Beres looked like a giant compared to Fragomeni, but the Italian overcame the disadvantage in size and attacked Beres relentlessly. During the third stanza, Fragomeni hit Beres with a fast and powerful series of hooks and Beres went down. In the fourth round, Fragomeni scored a well deserved KO. For most in attendance, this was the real main event, since Giacobbe Fragomeni was the local idol. Everybody in the arena understood that when Fragomeni made his way to the ring to the howls of the crowd. Salvatore Cherchi said that he never saw Fragomeni in such a good shape and plans on making a big fight for him within four months.

Andrea Sarritzu vs. Kemal Plavci – 6 rounds – Flyweights

Andrea Sarritzu is one of the most promising talents around. He was born on April 9, 1976 on the island of Sardinia, a place that was home to many great champions. Consider legendary Italian, European and WBC world flyweight champion Salvatore Burruni (109 fights between 1957 and 1969: 99-9-1). In seven years as a pro, Sarritzu compiled a record of 22 wins (only 7 KOs), 3 losses and 3 draws. He won the IBF intercontinental light flyweight crown and the WBO intercontinental flyweight title. His two battles with WBO world flyweight champion Omar Narvaez were surprisingly close and gave Sarritzu's reputation a big boost. On December 14, 2002 in Quartu Sant'Elena (Sarritzu's birthplace and hometown), Narvaez won by split decision. On August 9, 2003 in Cagliari, Sarritzu and Narvaez fought to a draw. Last July 8, in Vigo (Spain), Sarritzu lost a unanimous decision to European flyweight champion Ivan Pozo. In Milan, Sarritzu faced professional loser Kemal Plavci (3 wins and 12 defeats) and should have made short work of him. Instead, the match went the distance and Sarritzu was declared the winner. It was a good fight, with both guys trading combinations, but it could hardly be described as exciting.

Massimo Morra vs. Frederic Bonifai – 6 rounds – Super bantamweights

Massimo Morra is building a reputation in Civitavecchia, where he lives. Morra's record is14

wins (4 KOs), 1 loss and 1 draw. For his Milan debut, he faced an opponent, Frédéric Bonifai, with more experience, but on his way down: The Frenchman had a record of 28 wins (9 KOs), 25 losses and 3 draws. It should have been an easy win for Morra, but it ended in draw. A big disappointment for Morra's crew.

Fabrizio Tronu vs. Nikolai Michailov – 6 rounds - Bantamweights

Another promising prospect from Sardinia, Fabrizio Tronu won 11 of his 12 matches, only 2 wins coming by KO. Last July 22, in the tourist destination called Campione d'Italia, he got a decision over Frederic Gosset. Tronu's performance wasn't impressive, so everybody was waiting to see him in the ring against Nikolai Michailov. The Bulgarian had a record of 3 wins and 11 losses. He shouldn't have been a problem for Tronu; but he was. Michailov hit Tronu many times with good shots, and in the end the judges declared a draw. If Tronu wants to move up in the rankings, he must learn to make quick work of journeymen like Michailov.

Jerome Arnould vs. Cherif Saki – 6 rounds – Bantamweights

The surprise of the night: French Jerome Arnould (7 wins, 4 by KO, and 1 loss) lost on points to Algerian Cherif Saki who had just three fights on his record (1 win, 1 loss and 1 draw). Before this fight, Arnould was considered a prospect. From now on, he won't be considered at all.

The fights of Sarritzu, Branco and Fragomeni were broadcasted live by national network SportItalia. In a few days, they will be broadcasted in 54 European countries by Eurosport.