

Nasty Boyz

Written by Eddie Goldman

Tuesday, 14 February 2006 19:00

Stick too many people in too small a space, lock the door, have the walls slowly start to close in, and you are bound to see some very nasty behavior. This not only more or less seems to happen everyday on our beloved New York City subway, but also in the incredibly shrinking world of boxing.

ESPN's Brian Kenny proudly slammed "Pretty Boy" Floyd Mayweather Jr. last week during their "Friday Night Fights" verbal bout over Mayweather's April 8 contest with Zab Judah being billed as a world title fight, with Judah's tainted IBF belt on the line. Kenny spread equal blame to promoters and fighters for this charade – somehow he failed to mention the television networks – to which Mayweather responded, "I don't make the rules in boxing."

Hey Brian, this fight is for the IBF belt, not the PBF (Pretty Boy Floyd) belt, and as absurd as that may be, this may at present be Mayweather's best chance at earning big pay-per-view bucks. And fighters have much shorter windows for these opportunities for major paydays than do announcers.

Somehow there were no protestations, on-air at least, by the garrulous crew of ESPN2 – whose parent network does help "make the rules in boxing" – about what happened on their Monday night "Contenders" special in the main event between Peter Manfredo Jr. and Scott Pemberton.

Manfredo came into this fight with a record of 24-3 with only 11 KOs, and no stoppages in the last two years. This is not exactly the record of a renowned knockout artist, especially since he has not fought much top opposition. The 39-year-old Pemberton had been noticeably slurring his words in his pre-fight interviews on these same shows as Kenny's orations, which drew no yelling or even commentary, of course. Plus, Manfredo has usually been fighting as a junior middleweight, while Pemberton has been campaigning as a super middleweight, again a supposed advantage for Pemberton.

In their fight, however, Manfredo destroyed Pemberton in three rounds, about as badly as IBF champ Jeff Lacy had done just this past November. When the announcers would note how well Manfredo was landing his right, he would land with lefts as well. Two knockdowns into round three, Manfredo began pounding an almost defenseless Pemberton, and referee Dick Flaherty wisely stopped it.

Even before the stoppage, Pemberton was mainly weakly flailing his hands out in no particular direction, certainly not at Manfredo. After the fight, Pemberton slurred his way through yet another interview.

I'm still waiting for some analysis, nasty or otherwise, from "your boxing authority."

These guys also never fail to remind us that they recognize The Ring's belts. That's some good

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news for the magazine since they initiated a rather nasty word war with the bulk of the boxing media which does not grant their staff such authority, and has elicited a round of sometimes nasty rebuttals.

Ring editor Nigel Collins wrote on their website, in a piece also reproduced elsewhere, that “bickering between boxing writers isn't normally worthy of space in the magazine or on our Web site.”

You can guess the next word: “But the appearance of two recent anti-Ring screeds has necessitated a response” [emphasis added – EG]. He mainly tries to rebuff those who still bring up the 1977 Ring-ABC-Don King tournament scandal, pointing out that no one from that period has been associated with The Ring for decades.

In my critique of The Ring on this site last week on this issue, called “Should Titles Be Won in the Ring or in The Ring?” (<http://www.thesweetscience.com/boxing-article/3321/should-titles-won-ring-ring/>) – which he either failed to read, perhaps since I'm not a newspaper guy or because it appeared on that newfangled gizmo called the Internet, or he did read it and thought it was better than these “screeds” – I purposely did not raise that old 1977 scandal. There were far too many contemporary objections to what they have been doing to have included this, although the point that handing over the belts to just one commercial magazine makes corruption more likely is a valid one.

Collins concluded, “The success or failure of The Ring and its policies will be determined by the very people who pay the salaries of all of us involved, the boxing consumer. And if there is one thing I am absolutely positive of, it's that the fans are totally fed up with the status quo. I'm content to let them be the final judge, and allow the critics to do what they do best-complain.”

Hey Nigel, quit bellyaching that some other writers fired back at articles calling out the boxing media for not being volunteer p.r. guys for your business plan. When you start a fight, your nose might get bloodied. You would think that “The Bible of Boxing” would know that about fighting, be it verbal or otherwise.

The response to my piece last week was overwhelmingly positive. One message, from a reader in the Philippines, brought up a solution I have always advocated. He wrote, in part, “In my own honest opinion, I really believe that our dying sport needs a unified organization, which shall recognize the ‘world champion’ in its very essence, just like what the FIBA is to basketball.”

Exactly. The only problem is that the guys who “make the rules in boxing,” the promoters and the TV networks, those self-confessed “banks” of boxing, are mortally opposed to establishing any type of central boxing authority. That is the best solution, yet it is also not even being considered by anyone who profits from the fighters' toil.

Of course, we were bound to get one nasty comment, which is exactly what we got: one. A reader with a Canadian email address defended The Ring giving Vitali Klitschko its heavyweight belt when he beat Corrie Sanders. He wrote, “you must concede that the RING awarded him their belt by following the policy they had previously established - something that can't be said

for the sanctioning bodies.”

Our reader from the Great White North missed the point completely, since we acknowledged time and again that The Ring’s rankings are obviously far superior to those of any and all of the alphabet soup sanctioning bodies. That still didn’t make that fight one where the winner should have been considered to be the inheritor of the linear heavyweight title, since it excluded any number of more deserving heavyweights at the time, and did not lead to a tournament.

Then our critic turned nasty himself: “I agree completely with Detloff (sic). As a boxing journalist, you should never mention the alphabet organizations because in doing so, you only serve to keep their names in the public eye. The RING does more to try and bring boxing back to respectability and prominence than you ever will, so don’t waste ink bashing the one thing all boxing writers should be thankful for.”

Written more like an American than a Canadian, eh? Not to mention the alphabet titles is to not report all the facts. Some of us still want to do that. And as I pointed out, holding more than one of these belts sure gives a fighter a leg up on getting one from The Ring as well.

As for wasting “ink”, did you see any on your computer screen? More importantly, this critic had to resort to an ad hominem attack on me, which is bad enough, without even considering what we had tried to do with the Boxing Writers’ Rankings Poll (BWRP), on which I worked last year while editor-in-chief at BoxingRanks.com. That poll still exists, I am told, although it didn’t garner great influence and now that site is pretty much in hibernation these days.

Unlike our lone critic, those working on the creation of some type of independent media poll are trying to, as the mid-American folklorist Larry the Cable Guy puts it, Git-R-Done. Such a poll would blow away all these self-appointed boxing authorities. That it has not yet been successfully created in the first half of the first decade of the 21st century says nothing about its potential, assuming that boxing itself survives long enough for it to play a role in resuscitating it.

Now yet another group has come forward to try to do the poll thing. Called the WBM Pro Boxing Poll, short for World Boxing Media (<http://www.worldboxingmedia.com/>), this poll says it has signed up 45 voters from around the world. Upon inquiry, however, we were informed that they are not yet ready to release their list of voters, as was done at the start of the BWRP. While I was invited to join, I have not thus far, especially since I have no way of knowing if my fellow voters are, as a colleague of mine likes to say, a bunch of shoemakers.

Well, at least these folks weren’t nasty. The jury is still out, however, on whether that is a good or a bad thing.