

I Ain't Mailing Anymore

Written by Eddie Goldman
Tuesday, 28 February 2006 19:00

It happened one Saturday back in October, a few hours before the Diego Corrales-Jose Luis Castillo rematch on pay-per-view. It was already a rough time for me, as the site where I had been editor, Boxingranks.com, had basically gone into hibernation and let all the writers and editors go just a week earlier, and I had some health problems that were sidelining me. So I was home a lot, online a lot, and regrouping a lot. When you combine boxing, the media, and the Internet, you get these types of unstable situations, also a lot.

In the midst of juggling all these problems and planning a course of action to resolve them, suddenly I couldn't get on any website. I couldn't send or receive e-mail, either. I rebooted my computer, which was working fine, but still couldn't make contact with the rest of the world. Then I picked up my home phone to call Verizon, my DSL provider and also the outfit which pretends they are no longer a phone company since they sell so many other services.

The line was dead. There was no dial tone, period. I checked and rechecked all the gaggle of wiring connected to the phone jack, since the first thing to do in such situations is to check your connections, as any good telecom maven will delight in telling you. I even took a phone and connected it directly to the jack itself, with no other wires or devices in-between.

Still nothing, just silence.

Fortunately I do not use Verizon for my cell phone service (time to give the vastly underrated T-Mobile a plug here), so I called what is hilariously known as Verizon customer service to find out what was up, or, more precisely, out. First they wanted to send a tech out in several days. After more calls, more waiting, and more stalling, I learned that there was a major phone cable, serving about 1500 lines, out in my neighborhood. And they wouldn't even start to fix it until Monday.

Because of the overall series of problems explained above, it was not a good time for me to fork over whatever pile of cash was being asked to watch the pay-per-view. I had no idea when my phone service and, more importantly, Internet connection would return. And as it turned out, both would be down for about eight days.

Besides everything else I was attempting to accomplish without a home Internet connection, I now was faced with hunting down the results and a report on the Corrales-Castillo rematch through the conventional mainstream media. I felt as if I were stuck in a perpetual slow-motion machine.

I flipped around the TV sports networks, squinting to read the news crawl scrolling across the bottom of the screen. There were endless reports on the games people play, but about boxing I still found nothing. I turned to ESPNNews, a network which seems expressly designed for those who either don't know how to use the Internet or don't have a computer.

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Finally a blurb came on the screen reporting that Castillo had won the fight with a fourth-round knockout of Corrales. I was not really surprised by this reversal of fortunes from their first classic battle after hearing of Castillo's failure to make weight for what was supposed to be a lightweight title affair. Most suspect that he had long since given up that quest of regaining a belt in hope of winning the fight without being burdened by cutting weight. In any case, Castillo had clearly won.

I hung around ESPNNews a while longer, hoping for something more about what was a rematch of a fight virtually unanimously heralded as the 2005 fight of the year. Since I am a sometimes fan of both pro football and baseball, it wasn't the most excruciating thing I've had to do, but the longer I watched, the more I felt my brain cells numbing.

It was too late for me to start calling around for a description of the fight via my one working phone service. Boxing is the only sport which runs its most important events when most people are either sleeping, shtupping, or prowling about in hopes of finding a partner for the latter before having to do the former. As the phone line lay dead, my only hope was to join this herd and wait until the freedom of daybreak, when the late editions of the newspapers would be trucked to the newsstands.

Sometime that Sunday, a day which usually seems never long enough, I bought The New York Times and New York Daily News. The Times, that supposed newspaper of record, had nothing at all on this fight, at least in the sports section which was being sold as part of its late edition. The News, fortunately for the world or at least New York, did have a report from Las Vegas by Tim Smith, which I devoured. And yet I still felt hungry. I usually have almost instant access online to numerous such reports from as many sources as I care to read. Now the only thing available to me when I needed a meal was a snack.

One of the many consequences of boxing's marginalization is its almost total disappearance from the sports pages. The New York Daily News, always aimed at the working men, the wise guys, and the everyday people who know how to get things done, has kept up its regular boxing coverage. True, you can more easily find football predictions of car salesmen, odds and spreads for illegal gambling, and even "results" from the phony pro "wrestling" in its pages. But somewhere, usually, there is still a taste of the sweet science.

During the week, as I learned that at least several similar outages were affecting Verizon phone service in many neighborhoods in Manhattan, I was able to get out to a working computer connected to the Internet. But it's not as easy as some would think just to call someone up and ask if you could sit and work for who knows how many hours on their home computer.

The next time, fellow fight fanatics, you want to follow what is really up in boxing, try doing so without access to the Internet. Even if you have direct access to many insiders, or are one yourself, try finding out fast and thoroughly the ins and outs of a story without online information. It is, without exaggeration, painful.

The fact is that the bulk of boxing journalism, both in quantity and, yes, quality, has moved online and away from the dying world of the print media. We're here, without peer, so get used

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to it.

Which, ladies and germs of the jury, brings me to my next point. As a dues-paying member of the Boxing Writers Association of America, I recently received via a service even more obsolete than newspapers – the mail – a letter about the group's annual writing contest, known as the Barneys. I had won a third place in one of these a couple of years ago, and was considering entering again this year.

The letter, however – the contents of which was not sent by e-mail to any of the many addresses I use – specified that the entries had to be sent by mail, that is, printed out, put in an envelope licked shut with a stamp affixed, and taken and then dropped in a mailbox somewhere.

Boxing may be an old school sport, but there is no excuse why what is supposed to be the organization of its professional writers remains a slave to this old school, inefficient, time-consuming, costly, antiquated, and even medieval mechanical technology. What's more, many of us primarily work online. That has been the main venue for me for a decade now. I have nothing against magazines, as I still write columns for two of them and have a graduate diploma from NYU in magazine publishing. They, and even newspapers, have their place. But they are an inferior form of media, and have been eclipsed for many a year by online coverage of boxing.

If some judges or panel cannot use e-mail or cannot click on a link to read an article, how can they be expected to judge properly and intelligently the quality of what is written for this medium which is so mysterious to them? Any writer knows that their content is affected by and even designed for the medium for which it is prepared. I learned that back in the sixth grade, but that is another story.

If someone cannot use the journalistic and communication tools which have been standard for over a decade, how can they be qualified to issue judgments about the quality of the journalism of those who can? This is especially odious in boxing since the print and electronic media ignore it more and more while the online sites take up the slack.

There is also another even more egregiously bad assumption at work here. That is that what appears in print is inherently superior to what appears online or electronically. It is the prejudice of a doomed caste system which denigrates the online world, which those who fear cannot understand.

It is another version of the same anti-Internet propaganda you see today in competing forms of media about online services like the social networking site MySpace.com. Some alleged sexual predator was caught who used this site, and now you hear this site's name in all these negative headlines. Principals and bosses are rallying to ban those under their control from using this site, even at home. As I write this, the total number of accounts there is listed at 59,228,048. So is it news or surprising that a few among this 59 million are up to no good? Should we demand that since some schoolteachers, members of the clergy, and cops are predators or corrupt that we condemn them all and shield the women and children from them? But spreading such fear,

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ignorance, and panic is apparently fine with these journalistic experts when it comes to the Internet.

So I am just fed up with all this anti-Internet prejudice. Yes, I won an award for an online article, and last year several writers from this site won awards as well. But the rules of this contest and the way online journalists are treated can only be described as separate and unequal. And the last time, besides this writing contest, I had to submit an article to anyone in a form other than e-mail was 1996. That was for a magazine, which by the time of my next submission later that year started taking them by e-mail.

I am not asking anyone else to do what I am doing, but I have decided not to participate in this contest this year. This is despite the fact that I went through my 2005 articles and found a few which I felt were good candidates for this contest, and the deadline is still a few days away.

I'm just not riding in the back of the bus anymore.