

## My Sworn Enemies

Written by Eddie Goldman  
Tuesday, 11 April 2006 19:00

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For me to sit out a controversy in boxing is like Bernard Hopkins standing mute in front of a microphone, Don King getting a Donald Trump 'do, or James Toney whizzing past a free buffet empty-handed. It goes against our nature, our habits, our proclivities, our personalities, and maybe even our DNA.

But you won't see me jumping headlong into the controversy surrounding the tenth-round brawl during last Saturday's Floyd Mayweather Jr.-Zab Judah fight in Las Vegas, billed and marketed as "Sworn Enemies". At least not yet.

No, I'm not going soft in the head and I'm sure not selling out. The reason is far simpler than anything Freud, Einstein, or Marx (Groucho, not Zeppo) might have come up with: I ain't seen it yet, period.

Oh, I tried to see this fight, I sure did. The good lord or the NSA knows, for sure.

The plan for last Saturday night was, as I revealed on my blog ( <http://nhbnews.blogspot.com> ), to have a pay-per-view party of sorts. I called up my old friend Aaron Braunstein, host of "Wise Guys, Black Guys & Rabbis" – he says he fits in all three of these categories – to see if he was ordering the fight. He said he was, so I arranged to stop by his ritzy Upper West Side apartment, which he said was once the abode of Mike Tyson and Robin Givens. We were also to be joined by my friend and media colleague, Cynthia Chaplin of Cyn City Promotions, who would be arriving after conducting interviews with a few r&b artists.

And I came prepared to cover the fight from the TV, noting well that limited but nonetheless valuable perspective. I had my notebook, tape recorder, and microphone all set to document what went on, and especially our reactions to it all.

Then we tried to order the pay-per-view from Time Warner Cable.

Time Warner Cable.

Time Warner Cable.

Time Warner Cable.

OK, OK, I've put the gun back in my holster.

Aaron has a very legal digital cable box, two of them as a matter of fact, for whose use he pays a small fortune each month to you-know-whom. Plus, he was all set to pony up another \$44.95 for this pay-per-view, and although we were willing to share the cost, he probably wouldn't even have accepted anything as was his wont in the past. In any case, the cable beast was going to get fed Saturday night.

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For some still unknown reason, however, the digital cable box did not offer the option of ordering this pay-per-view through the remote. I'm a little better at using the features of these boxes and remotes than many people, but after checking the settings I couldn't find the problem. So Aaron called the number given on channel 301, where the main live pay-per-views are shown, which is (718) 358-0900.

And he called. And it was busy.

And called again. And it was still busy.

So he called again. And yea, it still was busy.

For over an hour-and-a-half.

As the digital numbers on the digital clock on the digital cable box kept getting higher and higher, we all, along with Aaron's gracious wife, gradually went from annoyance to disgust to anger to resignation. We couldn't order it. The card was more than half over. Results were already flooding the Internet. So I drank that Heineken they gave me, signaling that since I had started drinking, I wouldn't be working.

We also noticed that on the many channels devoted to pay-per-views, there was only this same one number to call. In the past when I have had to call this outfit, I reached their call center in northern Ontario. That's Canada, folks, for Time Warner Cable in New York City, US of A.

After we had decided that enough was enough, I did finally get through to this number, but of course was put on hold while a bunch of recordings played. One warned of technical difficulties with their video-on-demand service due to its "popularity." Translation from cable monopolyese: They have too few phone lines and reps available for a Saturday night with a big pay-per-view on. I hung up.

Aaron decided to call it a night. "I'm really tired of this," he complained. "I'm tired of getting beat by the system."

Then he began digging deeper: "On top of it, Zab Judah lost his last fight to a bum. Now he fights Mayweather, the best fighter in the world."

Still, we wanted to see this fight. Or did.

"To be treated like this is insulting to a hardcore boxing fan like myself," he stated, obviously pissed.

He then said Bob Arum and Don King, who were promoting this show, should "give us some fights for free or to charity." Now he was rolling.

"I'd rather see Mitch 'Blood' Green fight Butterbean anyway," he added. He might be able to, if he is willing to travel to the Convention Center in Ft. Smith, Arkansas, where they are scheduled

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to fight July 22. But if that fight is also on pay-per-view, well, just connect the dots.

The only good thing to come out of all this is that this tenth-round brawl was not seen by a wider audience than those who forked over the 45 bucks and had cable or satellite companies who actually delivered the signal.

That a brawl took place should not have been unexpected, since those who were promoting this fight were in essence trying to stir up bad blood between the fighters and their camps by calling it "Sworn Enemies". Both Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Zab Judah, at the kickoff New York press conference in February and all throughout the fight's build-up, stressed that they did not hate each other and actually respected one another. Of course, they each added that they had a job to do in the ring, but that is precisely what they were being paid to do.

Perhaps the real "Sworn Enemies" of HBO are – everyone else in boxing. Their next pay-per-views, in May and June, each directly compete with live televised cards in the U.S. The May 6 De La Hoya-Mayorga pay-per-view from Las Vegas conflicts with a live Don King-promoted card being televised on Showtime from Worcester, Mass. (King also promotes Mayorga, and has not announced where he will be that night.) The June 10 Tarver-Hopkins pay-per-view from Atlantic City conflicts with a Bob Arum-promoted pay-per-view from Madison Square Garden headlined by Miguel Cotto vs. Paulie Malignaggi.

What's good for HBO and its pay-per-view arm may not be good for boxing. But it certainly is good for the Time Warner stockholders. HBO's profits have been rising in recent years, reportedly totaling more than \$1 BILLION in 2004.

That's profits, not revenue.

So they might not miss Aaron's 45 bills. HBO is one of the most, if not THE most, profitable television networks in history. Remember that the next time you have to scrimp and save to pay that cable bill.

The fighters might miss the moolah, however, since they get a portion of the pay-per-view revenues.

If some of this sounds familiar, that's because when I went over to Aaron's to watch the Roy Jones Jr.-John Ruiz pay-per-view three years ago, the picture went out after a couple of rounds. Now Time Warner has improved its service so much that he couldn't even order the pay-per-view at all or reach any of their reps by phone.

Meanwhile, a free UFC show was playing on Spike TV.

After we gave up, I went back home to catch the results on the Internet, and also track down someone who was watching the show. I spoke on the phone with my friend Mo Lawal, who is a U.S. freestyle wrestling champion and also a huge boxing fan. He was watching the fight with friends at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, so I got the play-by-play over the phone of the last few rounds, including the brawl after the tenth round, and the results. Mo, by

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the way, competes this coming weekend in Las Vegas in the U.S. National Wrestling Championships. As the defending national champion, he is ranked number one at 185 lbs./84 kg and is favored to repeat.

After this little adventure, I did get a chance to meet up with Cynthia Chaplin and head down to the 12th anniversary celebration at Doc Holliday's Bar in the East Village. That was a load of fun and redeemed the night. This bar as always was filled with many people whom I know are boxing fans, including the bartender extraordinaire and manager Joanna, and one of the bouncers who was actually wearing a boxing shirt. Some folks there are or have been connected to the boxing world in various ways, either directly or through family.

But as all my rowdy friends partied on, and it got to be closing time, something stood out: No one, not one, asked me who won the fight, or anything else about it.