

Memo: Joan Guzman Will Not Be Fighting Laila Ali

Written by Michael Woods
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I consider myself an open-minded man. Being married to a politically progressive vegan helps in that regard. But I still admit to sophomoric tendencies now and again; there are times when I revert to fifth-grade-ish mentality.

For instance, anytime I hear the word “snatch,” as in “Bob snatched a cookie from Suzy” I snicker.

I’m sometimes a boob, I admit.

I just wrote “boob.” (Snicker)

So maybe I’m all alone here, maybe I’m in the minority, and our collective mindset has evolved here, but don’t you think that maybe, just maybe, Dominican superstar-in-waiting Joan Guzman (25-0, 17 KOs) would be further along in his ascent if his first name wasn’t “Joan?”

And it’s not pronounced like “Joan Jett,” the lady who leads the Blackhearts.

But please admit it, and tell me I’m not alone here. Joan is not a proper name for a boxer, unless that boxer is wearing a breastplate.

I hesitate to bring up this subject, because I like to think that we’ve all made so much progress in areas of bigotry and ignorance in the last thirty years. But just to clear up any confusion about Guzman, who, based on his record and charismatic fighting style alone should be regarded as a top five fighter, I submit that he should make it quite clear to any and all that he’s a guy.

The late country singer Johnny Cash had a number one hit on the charts in 1969 with a song called “A Boy Named Sue.” It told the sad tale of a fella who had a rotten, low-down daddy who played a really cruel trick on him: he named his boy “Sue.”

‘Well, he must o’ thought that is quite a joke/And it got a lot of laughs from a’ lots of folk/It seems I had to fight my whole life through/Some gal would giggle and I’d get red/And some guy’d laugh and I’d bust his head/I tell ya, life ain’t easy for a boy named Sue,’ sang Cash.

In the story, Cash finds his lowdown pappy and the two engage in a knock-down drag out rumble. In a pause, daddy dearest explains that he knew he’d be leaving, so in order to toughen his son up, he named him “Sue.” “Sue” in the song accepted the explanation and the two hugged it out.

But boxing is boxing, a wacky world unto itself, and much of a fighter’s success these days is tied to marketing. Maybe Sycuan and Golden Boy Promotions can have some fun with the situation and come up with a promo to capitalize on the confusion. That would be a smart move, especially if Guzman is attached to his first name, and resistant to changing it, even if the switch

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was only in effect in the ring.

The marketers could have a "Name Game" contest and give away tickets to Guzman's next title fight to the person who comes up with the best replacement name for the boxer.

Our attention spans have shrunken (like Jose Canseco's anabolic-infused testes) in the last 25 years, so a sports entertainer needs to be on message when he or she is trying to break through the muddle and make an impact. How many people are cruising the Net and automatically skip right past an article about "Joan Guzman" because they don't dig seeing chicks smacking each other around? I'm guessing the number isn't insignificant.

Of course, if 'Little Tyson' gets more PPV play, and shows off his superior style and considerable skill-set in similar fashion as he did in dispatching Javier Jauregui (UD10) on May 6, then the name discussion will cease.

Guzman, age 30, is after all a former super bantam titlist, with a tremendous amateur career (312-10 record) in his pocket. He is right now an appropriate addition to the Barrera/Morales/Pacquiao three-way cluster, and though he isn't a puppy in that weight neighborhood, he hasn't had the wars the Big Three have fought.

Tender hands have been an issue, though, and Guzman hurt both hands on Jauregui's noggin on Saturday. They swelled up in the dressing room after the fight, said Jose Nunez, his manager. The fighter went to the hospital to determine the level of damage. An onsite doctor in Las Vegas said a fracture was a possibility.

If his hands allow, Nunez says that Guzman would likely take a tuneup on July 29 and then may fight on De La Hoya's September date against TBD.

"He'll fight whatever champion at 130 pound," Nunez says.

Regarding the name issue, Nunez says that the idea of switching it, at least for ring appearances, has come up. "He's never decided to change it," the manager said. "The name is common in the Dominican Republic."

Nunez, for one, isn't thrown by the situation. He acts as an advisor to former junior welterweight titlist Vivian Harris.