

Hooking off the jab

Written by Robert Cassidy Jr.
Tuesday, 30 May 2006 19:00

The World Cup is set to begin on June 9. The month-long soccer tournament is the most widely viewed athletic event in the world.

That may be hard for us here in the United State to fathom. Yet while the Super Bowl draws a television audience from anywhere between 50 and 100 million, it was estimated that more than 30 billion people worldwide watched the 2002 World Cup tournament and approximately 1.5 billion people watched the final match.

Those are some impressive stats, even in a country where football is played with the hands. And while “football” is played in far more countries than American football, that is only part of the draw. The other main ingredient for the success of the event is nationalism. People tune in to root for their country.

I know. This is a boxing column, so you are asking what’s my point? One more quick diversion. Baseball tried to capitalize on the soccer format by launching the first-ever World Baseball Classic this year. It may not have been an over-the-top success, but consider that in the United States, television audiences on ESPN eclipsed a million viewers for some games. That was more than most of the network’s other programs in the month of March.

I was fortunate enough to cover a series of games at Bithorn Stadium in San Juan, Puerto Rico. The games – particularly when Puerto Rico played – took on a block-party type atmosphere. It was festive, it was exciting and it was hard not to get caught up in the hype.

I have also been fortunate enough to witness the frenzy that is an international soccer match.

Let me tell you, boxing could use that kind of passion.

Boxing is as global a sport as soccer and as steep in tradition as baseball. Anyone who has attended the fights of Prince Naseem Hamed, Wayne McCullough or any number of Mexican fighters who have stoically marched into the ring to the battle cry of May-heeco, May-heeco, understands that nationalism is alive and well in boxing.

So why can’t professional boxing cash in on this formula. I mean, can it get any worse? In a perfect scenario, it would make sense to begin some kind of world tournament. But, of course, boxing is not perfect. The self-interests of the governing bodies, promoters – and even many of the fighters – would in all likelihood never allow for such a tournament.

But why let reality spoil the plan?

I am not talking about a “Contender” reality show, but a legitimate tournament with world-rated fighters. Given that a world champion would have far more to lose than gain, let’s allow the champions to be excluded. In fact, is there a better incentive than to guarantee the winners of each weight class a shot at the title?

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This tournament would essentially be run by weight class, but countries could pile up points as their fighters progress, giving the participants another incentive. The tournament would be open to the Top 10 rated fighters in each weight class. To prevent an overwhelming amount of American fighters, the limit per-nation, per-weight class would be two fighters. In many cases – since multiple Americans are often in the top 10 – the tournament would have to draw beyond the first 10 fighters until the country quota is filled.

I would also recommend a consensus of ratings – including the much-maligned governing bodies, The Ring magazine and Boxrec.

Let's just take a look at the possible pairings in a few weight classes.

Heavyweights

Samuel Peter (Nigeria)
Oleg Maskaev (Khazakhstan)
James Toney (USA)
Lamon Brewster (USA)
Alexander Dimitrenko (Ukraine)
Timo Hoffman (Germany)
Paolo Vidoz (Italy)
Danny Williams (England)
Serguei Lyakhovich (Belarus)
Sinan Samil Sam (Turkey)

Middleweights

Edison Miranda (Colombia)
Bernard Hopkins (USA)
Winky Wright (USA)
John Duddy (Ireland)
Sebastian Sylvester (Germany)
Raymond Joval (Holland)
Howard Eastman (England)
Felix Strum (Germany)
Sam Soliman (Australia)
Scott Dann (England)

Junior Welterweight

Junior Witter (England)
Jose Luis Castillo (Mexico)
Kostya Tszyu (Australia)
Joel Casamayor (Cuba)
Demetrius Hopkins (USA)
Paul Malignaggi (USA)
Juan Lazcano (Mexico)
Cesar Rene Cuenca (Argentina)
Andreas Kotelnik (Ukraine)

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Lovemore N'dou (South Africa)

Junior Lightweight

Manny Pacquiao (Philippines)
Erik Morales (Mexico)
Rocky Juarez (USA)
3-K Battery Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai (Thailand)
Robbie Peden (Australia)
Cassius Baloyi (South Africa)
Alex Arthur (Scotland)
Jorge Solis (Mexico)
Jorge Linares (Venezuela)
Nobuhito Honmo (Japan)

Let the games begin.

Third time's a charm. The first two Diego Corrales-Jose Luis Castillo fights were classics. And yet, each fight was somewhat marred by controversy. In the first battle, won by Corrales, there was this little thing about Corrales intentionally spitting his mouthpiece out.

In the rematch, oh yeah, Castillo failed to make weight. The fight went on, but the heavier Castillo pounded Corrales into submission. I hope there is no such controversy this time around. In another classic, I will pick Castillo to win once again, this time by late-round stoppage.

Oscar Worthy. I really don't have much interest in an Oscar de la Hoya-Floyd Mayweather fight. If Oscar wins, so what, he was supposed to beat the smaller fighter. If he loses – and let's face it, he has trouble with guys faster than he is – it's just one more chink in the armor of boxing's biggest meal ticket. If Oscar is concerned about his place in history, then perhaps a third showdown with Sugar Shane Mosley is the best option. Mosley, of course has to get by Fernando Vargas. But the first two Mosley-de la Hoya fights were thrilling. Oscar has long talked about avenging his losses. With Felix Trinidad in retirement, Bernard Hopkins nearing retirement, Mosley is the only viable option.

As for Mayweather, I'd rather see him fight Ricky Hatton, Miguel Cotto or even Oscar Diaz or Kassim Ouma.