Bob Arum doesn't sound anything like your gramps when he talks about the good old days.

He doesn't rant about how people use to mean what they say, and say what they mean.

He doesn't lament the fact that all the kids these days are baby blimps, loud-mouthed ADDers ODd on fast food and video games.

No, Arum offered a constructive take on the state of the sport, or two facets of the savage science, on a Wednesday afternoon conference call hyping the Miguel Cotto/Paulie Malignaggi fight at Madison Square Garden on June 10.

First, Arum complained that the TV networks run the show without regard for the live audience at shows, the shows have suffered for that and consequently, live audiences have been declining in recent years.

Second, along the same lines, Arum believes that promoters have been functioning too long now as front men for the TV suits, and simply put together the matches the suits call for.

"Where did the fun go?" Arum asked rhetorically. "TV people have taken over events. Not just HBO, but Showtime and ESPN. The producers and directors direct the event, the crowd noise, and it's the only sport in which that happens."

"A producer telling the Notre Dame band to pipe down because the broadcast announcer was being drowned out? Wouldn't happen in a million years," Arum points out. "It's killing attendance at fights. People want music, they want fun."

Speaking to that, Arum says he will liven up the proceedings on June 10, and offer music in between rounds and bouts.

I'm all for it. In between bouts, my neck gets tired craning and scanning the various sections for fan beefs and provocatively dressed women who I speculate are hookers hired by high rollers.

Arum gave an example of TV taking over. At one card, he said, he asked Michael Buffer why he didn't announce the presence of Jack Nicholson during a card. I wanted to, Buffer said, but the producers told me to shut my yap because the analysts needed to do some analysis.

And so what happened? There was a lull in the action, and everyone at the arena sipped their beers, peered around for some visual spectacle to pass the time, and the vibe suffered for it. And the person who laid down the dough for the seat? He had an OK time, most likely. There were a couple good fights on the card, a couple snoozers…all in all, he had an OK time, but the experience didn't knock his socks off.

If he went to an NBA game in recent years, there were dancers to drool over at halftime, and kids walking around shooting t-shirts into the crowd with a slingshot. Even if the game sucked, at least there were other compelling elements to take in. Not so at the average fight card, sadly...

In conjunction with Arum's "promoters have lost their willingness/ability to do promotional grunt work" theme, the 74-year-old Barnum touched on the ethnic battle lines that are being drawn for the MSG show. Puerto Rican against Italian, Irishman against TBA (presumably not another Irishman), Filipino against Afro-American, etc. There should be more promotions built around fighter's ethnicities, he feels.

Arum didn't get into much in the way of specifics on why ethnic rivalries began to die out in the 80s, and may be back on an upswing.

My theory is that we're swinging back the other way on the political correctness pendulum. In the mid 80s, raging into the 90s fueled by high-octane self-righteousness, free speech eroded noticeably, as virtually any marketing reference to someone's ethnicity was avoided, for fear of being branded racist. The LA riots, Rodney King's situation and the OJ Simpson tragedy opened up the Pandora's Box on race and class, and even a benevolent but ignorant soul could get hammered in a heartbeat if he didn't use the most current designation for any number of ethnicities. So the topic, wisely, was often avoided...

That aversion made itself felt in fight marketing.

Instead of playing up matchups that would exploit (in a good way) ethnic rivalries, which would heighten interest by playing into people's nationalistic leanings, promoters didn't play the race card. No one wanted to be accused of crass exploitation, or insensitivity, or outright bigotry.

So, instead of playing into people's understandable inclination to root for their fighter who happened to hail from the same nation as they, against another nation's pride, the proud tradition of ethnic faceoffs dwindled.

I'm all for ethnicity-based matchmaking.

Immigrants arrive in the US hoping to better themselves in a more stable economy, but they hold on to the dear traditions and customs of their homeland. When a homeland fighter cuts a swath in the States, the immigrant rooter can point to his man with chest-puffed pride and luxuriate in the fighter's skills and glory by proxy. Nothing wrong with that in the least...

Arum's critique makes sense to me. Now, will he still be singing this tune when he kisses and makes up with HBO? That remains to be seen.

Listen, Oscar was 4,000 people short of capacity in Vegas. This, in Oscar's first fight back in 20 months against a name opponent with deliciously dastardly tendencies.

Not a strong sales effort all things considered. I hesitate to bring up the MMA specter that's

breathing down the neck of the savage science, readying a rear-naked choke on the Marquis' brainchild, but the gap is closing.

SPEEDBAG

I cracked up during the Tuesday conference calls. One writer who participated in the 2 PM Arum/Cotto call and then also participated in the 3 PM DiBella/Malignaggi call straddled two sides of the fence masterfully.

First, the writer, who shall remain nameless, asked Cotto if he thought that Malignaggi was talking too much trash, and wondered whether the fighter thought, as the writer does, that rookies 'should be seen and not heard.'

Half an hour later, the writer asked Malignaggi about all his trash talking versus Cotto, but left out the editorial slam when he queried Paulie. The straddler even added the requisite "with all due respect" mitigator when he asked Paulie about talkin' smack.

Skillfully, if sneakily played, Nameless…

---Cotto lauded Paulie for his mouthiness, wisely comprehending that Malignaggi is selling the fight with his blather. But he did promise to send Maliganngi back to where he was fighting before, "clubs in New York." I asked Paulie about that crack and he responded immediately. "Cotto's in for a rude awakening," he said. "I'll break his face come Saturday night. He's messing with the wrong guy."

Pure speculation here, but I expect Malignaggi, who's no dim bulb, the kid is trilingual, knows his strengths and weaknesses well. He will not be looking to take out Cotto, no matter what he says for promotional and intimidation purposes, but will stay on the outside, stay on his toes, get in and get the hell out against the heavy-handed Puerto Rican.

---On the topic of Paulie, he's never strayed into inappropriate territory while trash talking. A writer asked him about the Puerto Rican Day Parade, which runs the day after his fight, and Paulie gracefully talked about how many of his friends are Puerto Rican, and said he'd love to attend. How well he'd be accepted if he were to beat Cotto, he allowed, might be another story entirely...

--Malignaggi isn't interested in delving into his hand woes. I'll leave that for the writers to dissect and discuss, he says. My hands are 100%, he insists...