

LAS VEGAS, Aug. 4 – You can connect the dots, but that doesn't mean they go anywhere....Tomorrow's latest edition of dueling dates has four nice fights, but none of them seem capable of chasing the summer doldrums....Well, next week I'll have Dennis Rappaport for inspiration. It'll probably lead me to look for a job as a foreign correspondent.

The HBO bouts from Madison Square Garden tomorrow night are both competitive betting fights, at least according to my friendly neighborhood bookmaker. Vernon Forrest is somehow a slight favorite (minus \$1.65) over Ike Quartey (plus \$1.45) in the main event between two middle-aged former welterweights who have gone up to 154....In another intriguing junior middleweight matchup, the talented Kassim Ouma is "only" – I use the word advisedly – a minus \$1.35 choice over the undefeated Sechew Powell (plus \$1.15).

Up at Lake Tahoe, Showtime will feature the Marquez brothers in a pair of bouts with belts on the line, but I can't find a line on them, which is an indication perhaps that the foreign challengers are not too highly rated, except by the (in)appropriate sanctioning bodies. Nonetheless, it is always good TV to see the Mexico City boychiks. Silence Mabuza of South Africa, who was stopped in four bloody rounds by Rafael, demanded a rematch and now the masochist has it....Rafael, who last I looked was No. 8 on my pound-for-pound list, says this is his farewell to 118 pounds....Juan Manuel, still at 126, goes for another WBOgus title against Terdsak – and yes, there have been jokes about the poor guy's name – Jandarng of Thailand.

Thanks to the wonders of tape delay, I'll be able to get in all four bouts so, please, nobody call with any early results....Speaking of Nobody, that's who Roy Jones Jr. fought last week before a half-empty (no, not half-full) house in Boise, Idaho. Prince Nobody was only slightly more animated than a heavy bag after his first-round attack left him out of breath...."I'm glad the dude won," said John Hornewer, who used to be one of Roy's attorneys before walking away from the deluded egotist long before Jones lost it. Horny couldn't watch, but from what he heard, he said he was afraid Jones would continue his make-believe career. "There's no one around him to stop him," said Horny, mindful that the Levin brothers are also gone.

Yes, Li'l But Bad Stevie Johnston was too li'l for Vivian Harris, but give Vicious some credit as he stamped himself as still a major player in the 140-pound division. Johnston is going back to 135, where his courage and heart should get him another payday – and possibly another beating....Meanwhile, Joshua Clotey's workmanlike victory over Richard Guttierrez Rodriguez will probably get him Antonio Margarito on Dec. 2. Clotey's got a shot....Sultan Ibragimov was a big disappointment in his draw with the slow-starting Ray Austin. Yes, he could become a heavyweight champion, but no, he's nothing special.

Love Bob Arum waving the flag almost as furiously as Don King does with his trumpeting of next weekend's Hasim Rahman-Oleg Maskaev WBCOUNTERFEIT belt as America's last line of defense against the Soviet invasion. Arum was not even embarrassed when Maskaev, who lives in Staten Island, protested that he was an American citizen....Rahman, though, was buying. He

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Written by Michael Katz

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said “never before I felt like I put my country on my back.” The Rock’s a good guy, but I don’t quite picture him as George Washington II.

I want to know if this guy, Jeremy Bates, that Evander Holyfield is fighting Aug. 18 in Dallas is a man or motel. I can already imagine the shower scene afterwards. I suspect both contestants might be liable to vertigo....Yes, it’s for the birds and enough Hitchcock, who you probably didn’t spot in the first paragraph.

Speaking of Holyfield, Hornewer said if Jones, coming off his victory against John Ruiz, had been able to get the old champ into the ring, it could have been a great finale to Roy’s career, with maybe a Mike Tyson fight thrown in, too. Horny said the problem was Don King owed Holyfield \$2 million and insisted that the \$10 million purse for the Roy Jones fight included that old debt. Holyfield insisted on \$10 million for the fight, plus the \$2 million the promoter owed. “Maybe if Roy had chipped in \$1 million,” said Hornewer, “they could have made the fight.” Instead, the proud Jones opted to return to 175 pounds and got knocked out in his rematch with Antonio Tarver. And that’s how he became history.

I think the reason Jones went to Boise was to get the incompetent Jerry Armstrong to be the referee. Armstrong absolutely refused to let Prince No Badi Amaju work inside....No Badi had a brave corner – when the Prince of Camden, N.J., mentioned “I can’t breathe” after the eighth round, he was still sent out to take some more body shots.

Juan Manuel Marquez, who lost in the jungles of Indonesia to Chris John – those who have seen tapes say it was, well, if not a robbery, a rather dubious decision – said tomorrow “I come to the fight to prove I am still Juan Manuel Marquez.”...Rahman was knocked out of the ring, virtually onto Jim Lampley, by Maskaev in a 1999 Atlantic City bout that almost started a riot (there was no Rock Newman around to blame, though). The Rock’s family and friends were sitting on the same side as the HBO “talent” and rushed to see how their man was doing. The A.C. security overreacted – hey, how were they to know it was Rock’s people? – and the next thing, there’s a big skirmish....Now the Maskaev camp is requesting the Nevada State Athletic Commission to “pad” the floor around the ring, just in case....Someone asked Rahman if he minded the obvious Dennis Rappaport attempt to get in his head. “You can’t play mind games with me,” Rahman said...Rappaport also says that Rahman wakes up every morning in a cold sweat, dreaming bout Maskaev’s right hand. I hope Mrs. Rahman does not mind Dennis the Menace’s proximity to her husband.

Chris Byrd would love to fight O’Neil Bell, the true cruiserweight champion. Bell would love to meet the two-time heavyweight world titlist. But Jose Sulaiman has ruled that Bell must make a mandatory defense first against Jean-Marc Mormeck, whom he upset in their unification bout in January....Mormeck jumped from No. 3 to No. 1 after beating a lamp-post, but Sulaiman says the new Nos. 2 and 3 should meet to face the Bell-Mormeck winner. Fair enough?...Hell no, unless you think Sulaiman is the puppet of Don King, who happens to promote Mormeck, not Bell, and would not cry too long if his old sparring partner, Byrd, gets hurt....Bell should do the right thing and shove the belt....Oh, never mind....Meanwhile, Byrd possibly could meet perennial Canadian cruiser contender Dale Brown by year’s end....See where Dandy Dan Rafael of espn.com breaks the news that if Rahman beats Maskaev – and why is he only minus

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\$2 to win when he should be minus \$5 and I don't care about 1999 – he could next defend the Sulaiman belt in Macao, or Macau, which is down the shore from Hong Kong. Arum's Vegas buddy, Steve Wynn, is opening a glitzy casino in Macao, an old Portuguese enclave on the South China coast, this fall and a Rahman defense would certainly be a nice sideshow. Too bad there are no Chinese heavyweight contenders at the moment.

PENTHOUSE: Me, not only did I buy the Roy Jones Jr. show – hey, the Arthur Williams-Kenny Keene was fun until Keene started taking a terrible beating for which his corner should be moved to the OUTHOUSE – but I managed to get in Vicious Vivian Harris's blowout of game Stevie Johnston and Joshua Clotey's grueling victory over Richard Guttierrez. Plus, without missing my Friday dose of Monk, I got to see the Sultan Ibramigov-Ray Austin duel that should have eliminated both from title considerations. If I'm not careful, I might get as bad as Dandy Dan.

OUTHOUSE: No Badi here but Ajamu. Hey, if he didn't want to fight, he should've just quit instead of trying to take the low road to get out of his beating from Roy Jones Jr. He obviously was hitting Jones low in order to get disqualified. He was docked three meaningless points and allowed to take a beating for all 12 rounds.