

The Best of 2006 Awards

Written by David A. Avila

Tuesday, 19 December 2006 19:00

Twelve months after the world of prizefighting comes to an end for the year 2006, with it come the awards for those boxers who stood out among the thousands of others.

Beginning in January 2006 a number of boxers stepped forward to meet each other for some riveting matches that took place in New York, Los Angeles, New Jersey, Las Vegas and other cities around the world.

Here are the awards for the year 2006:

Fighter of the Year

Floyd Mayweather Jr.

A number of boxers had an outstanding year but few had compelling fights that exemplified the best of professional boxing. My choice for Fighter of the Year is welterweight Floyd Mayweather Jr. for meeting the lightning quick Zab Judah and the physically stronger Carlos Baldomir and beating them in 12-round decisions despite a pair of crystal-like fists that suffer injury every time he gets in the ring.

It was a close decision between Mayweather and Filipino knockout artist Manny "Pac Man" Pacquiao who demolished Oscar Larios and Erik Morales twice. Mayweather broke his hand against Baldomir and beat him one-handed. He also hurt the right hand against Judah and won by decision.

Could Pacquiao have beaten Morales twice and Larios without his left hand? I seriously doubt it. That's why Mayweather deserves the award as the best fighter of 2006.

Honorable mention goes to Juan Diaz, Joe Calzaghe, Joan Guzman and Israel Vazquez who all had a great 2006.

Fight of the Year

Israel Vazquez vs. Jhonny Gonzalez

On the big stage the little guys in the junior featherweight division put on the best show. It was fitting that on Mexican Independence day two Mexican fighters from Mexico City named Israel Vazquez and Jhonny Gonzalez fought like their lives depended on it. Both hit the deck before Vazquez landed three lightning left hooks and a right hand in the 10th round of their battle for the WBC junior featherweight title on Sept. 16 in Las Vegas. It proved to be the most riveting fight of the year with both showing skill, power and pride in their craft.

Honorable mention goes to Sergei Liahokovich and Lamon Brewster for their heavyweight

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slugfest.

But the little guys let it all hang out with skill and speed and a lot more punches.

Comeback of the Year

Oscar De La Hoya

After nearly two years without a fight East Los Angeles native Oscar De La Hoya returned to boxing against Nicaragua's Ricardo "El Matador" Mayorga and promptly knocked him out. The display of speed and power proved that the Golden Boy still has plenty of fuel left to meet Floyd Mayweather on May 5, 2007. It could be one of the biggest prizefights in the history of the sport.

Southern California Fighter of the Year

Chris "The Nightmare" Arreola

Usually two undefeated heavyweights from California would be avoiding each other until a world title fight would be the reward. But Damian "Bolo" Wills and Arreola each pushed to meet each other from the beginning of their pro careers. Riverside's Arreola emerged the winner after seven rounds in a heavyweight clash that reminded many of the golden days of boxing in California. Both Arreola and Wills have a chance to do big things in the world stage very soon.

El Mas Macho Award

Glen Johnson

With respects to Lupe Contreras who coined the phrase "El Mas Macho," the Jamaican native Johnson has proven to be the ultimate road warrior in accepting matches against anyone, anywhere, including Clinton Woods in his backyard last September in Lancashire, England. He lost a split decision to Woods in their third meeting but what's new? Johnson fears no man and doesn't care where he fights.

Good Sport Award

Roman Karmazin

Boxing has many athletes who display good sportsmanship, but when it comes to losing a world title fight it's often difficult to accept defeat. Russia's Roman Karmazin lost his junior middleweight title and refused to offer excuses or berate the subpar refereeing in his fight against Cory Spinks on July 8. Karmazin showed remarkable poise and consideration for representing sportsmanship in his sport.

Will-O'-the-Wisp Award

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Ivan Calderon

In honor of the late Willie Pep this award goes to the best pure boxer of the year. The Puerto Rican boxer Ivan "Iron Boy" Calderon fights year after year and rarely loses a round let alone gets punched cleanly. It's too bad Calderon fights in the strawweight division. He needs a showcase for his unbelievable boxing skills.

Too Dangerous Award

Victor Ortiz

In boxing there are fighters that other fighters fear to fight and Oxnard's Victor Ortiz is one of them. He's one of those boxers with one-punch knockout power that can strip an opponent of his senses. Ortiz is following the lead of Manny Pacquiao who he's sparred with many times. Aside from his boxing skills the southpaw packs pure power in each of his fists.

Blood and Guts Award

Paul Malignaggi

Mental and physical toughness exemplify most prizefighters who risk their lives every time they step in the ring. Paul Malignaggi showed what toughness is all about in his 12-round battle against Miguel Cotto on June 10, 2006. In that fight he sustained injuries that would make most fighters quit but he continued and never stopped trying to win the fight, not just survive. It was a sterling performance for the Italian-American from New York City.

Dark Horse Award

Joan Guzman

He jumped up two weight divisions from junior featherweight to junior lightweight without a hiccup in beating world titleholders Javier Jauregui and Jorge Barrios. Now he wants to face Pac Man, and why not? He won so easily against Jauregui and Barrios that he actually let them hit him to make the fights more interesting.

Because he's from the baseball crazy Dominican Republic, few give him his due. But this guy is the "Big Papi" of boxing. He can fight with the best.