

The Wonder and Magic of Reality TV

Written by Rick Folstad

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I used to watch the “Contender” when it first aired on TV. It was about prize fighting and prize fighters and it seemed to have a pretty good concept going. We got to watch guys train and interact with each other and compete in some crazy contests as a team.

But then something strange began to happen. They started holding the fights, and everything seemed to turn a little crazy. Suddenly, it all seemed too contrived.

First, I noticed that because it was TV, a lot of the fighters had their family come into the locker room with them just minutes before they went out to fight. You shouldn't be hugging and kissing your 5-year-old daughter just a few minutes before you go out and try to tear a guy's head off.

You don't see families in NFL locker rooms just before the game starts.

Second, how come all the fights were so close? If one guy won the first two rounds, you almost knew the other guy was going to win the next two. With fights scheduled for five-rounds, it made the fifth round the big round.

But that's because it's TV. It needs drama. You can't have a guy scoring a first-round knockout. Not good for ratings.

But what was even stranger was that some of the fighters who lost would sit in their locker room after the fight and get choked up and teary-eyed.

“That's crazy,” I remember telling my wife. “These guys shouldn't be crying because they lost a fight. They should be pissed, and maybe pout a little. But they shouldn't be crying.”

Some things you should cry over. Lost loved ones, of course. And I can understand shedding a few tears when they shot Ol' Yeller because he had rabies.

“Brian's Song” is a tear-jerker and any guy who didn't get a lump in his throat watching that show for the first time, is either lying or is colder than Maine in February.

But you don't cry over losing a fight. How do I know? Because I had 60 amateur fights and 22 pro fights, and in all those years and all those wins and losses, I don't ever remember seeing anybody (outside a promoter or two) actually shed tears over a fight.

You want a reason to cry in the fight game? I'll give you one. Back in the late 1970s, I was undefeated as a pro and was being teased with a possible national TV fight against 1976 Olympian lightweight Howard Davis if I could stay undefeated. Remember, there were no ESPN fights back then. This would have been on network TV. Saturday afternoon. ABC's Wide World of Sports, or something like that. Big money.

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But first I was scheduled to fight an old warhorse named Johnny Copeland in a co-main event at the Metropolitan Sports Center in my hometown of Minneapolis.

We called it a tune-up. Win that fight and they told me Howard Davis was just a signature away.

In front of an estimated crowd of almost 6,000 close family and friends, I lost a 10-round decision to Copeland after the guy came back in the latter rounds and started nailing me with right hands. He couldn't miss, and I made sure he didn't.

So-long, Howard. Bye ABC. See ya, big money.

A local sports columnist, a guy named Don Riley, wrote "Marie Antoinette had it easier on the chopping block than Folstad had it last night at the Met Center."

He was always one of my favorite columnists.

But did I cry in the locker room? No. Did I come close to crying? No. Did I shake it off? No. Did I hang my head? Yes. Did I skulk around for the next three months? Yes. Was I impossible to live with? Yes.

Almost 30 years later, does that loss still bother me? You're damn right it does. I'll carry that loss to my grave.

But I've never shed a tear over it.

Do I still cry every time I watch "Brian's Song?" Yes.

Do I still watch the "Contender"? No.

So if I'm not a big Peter Manfredo Jr., fan, it's not because of Peter. It's because of the way he got his April 7 fight with WBO super-middleweight champ Joe Calzaghe.

Manfredo is 26-3 with 12 KOs, but he's never faced anyone with the talent and experience of Calzaghe.

So how did Manfredo get this fight? I'd like to think he earned it. But I think a lot of it was through the wonder and magic of reality TV, which isn't always that magical or real. They picked Manfredo because he's been on TV and everyone knows who he is. And that will sell tickets.

But again, that's TV.

Sure wish I could have been on it.