

Is Mayweather Following Dempsey's Path?

Written by Raymond Markarian
Monday, 10 December 2007 19:00

Months before his epic performance against Ricky Hatton I wrote an article about Floyd Mayweather's desire to be recognized as global superstar (Boxing Retirement: A New Political Strategy... Look it up.)

At the end of Floyd Mayweather's post fight interview with Larry Merchant, he hinted at taking a long break from boxing. PBF said that he was ready to take two years off to spend with his family. This has got me thinking about the essence of Floyd Mayweather. He is not only a great fighter and a smart business man; he is seemingly also a boxing historian.

If Floyd Mayweather takes a break from boxing he will follow the footsteps of another legendary fighter, Jack Dempsey.

During the boxing golden era of the 1920's, Jack Dempsey was the world's most recognized athlete. His fights seemed to always generate record attendance figures and cause riots in the streets. But the genius of Jack Dempsey was not his knockout ratio, it was his celebrity. Most people overlook the fact that Jack Dempsey only defended his heavyweight title seven times in six years.

Before Dempsey's title reign, boxing was at a down point in popularity. The great Jack Johnson lost to Jess Willard in 1915, but Willard was not a popular champion. Willard defended his title only three times in four years. The country was looking for a boxing hero, and found the "Great White Hope" in Jack Dempsey. In 1919, Dempsey crushed Willard in a Mayweather/Gatti like beat-down and began his venture into legendary status.

Much like Floyd Mayweather, Dempsey fought during an information renaissance. In the 1920s, sports fans were addicted to newspaper headlines and radio events the way we are obsessed with the internet and instant information news wires today.

In 1921, Dempsey's bout against Georges Carpentier was a Mayweather/De la Hoya type event. Dempsey vs. Carpentier generated the first million dollar gate in boxing history and was the first boxing fight broadcasted live over the radio. The fight was dubbed "The Battle of the Century" and ended in a fourth round knockout. The media attention for Dempsey's victory enhanced his star power.

In 1923, Dempsey fought Lou Firpo in front of 85,000 raucous fans at the Polo Grounds. Many boxing experts consider Dempsey vs. Firpo the greatest fight in boxing history (Firpo was coincidentally an aggressively exciting, overmatched, foreign fighter with a huge following like Ricky Hatton.)

In the first round of Dempsey vs. Firpo, Dempsey was knocked down twice and once fell through the ropes. But he later recovered to knockout Firpo in the second round of a Hagler/Hearns type slugfest.

Is Mayweather Following Dempsey's Path?

Written by Raymond Markarian
Monday, 10 December 2007 19:00

Now, Floyd Mayweather has followed a similar trajectory in his last two fights. Mayweather vs. De la Hoya was an earth rattling event and Mayweather's knock out victory against Ricky Hatton was arguably his greatest performance.

After the Firpo fight, Dempsey did not defend his title for another three years. He refused to fight a black contender named Henry Wills because of racial motives, and instead became a global icon. Dempsey used his celebrity to star in movies and become a spokesman in charitable events.

As a champion, Jack Dempsey fought an average of once a year. But his career is legendary. The irony is that sports history forces us to forget the faults of famous athletes. A legend will stay a legend as long as the media continues to create that image. Despite his long layoff in between fights, Jack Dempsey was still considered a sports idol.

Star power is the greatest leverage an athlete can have. And the United States protects our sports heroes unless they becoming threatening. Men like Michael Vick and Barry Bonds are seen as the enemy because they challenge normalcy. Whereas, Lebron James and Tiger Woods are icons that seem like they can't do wrong.

Floyd Mayweather has the opportunity to turn his career myth into legend. He can continue to fight regularly, possibly lose focus, and follow the path of Roy Jones Jr. Or he could pull a Jack Dempsey, take some time off, rekindle his love for the sport, and return to glory.

When Dempsey returned from his three year layoff his record was 1-2. Mayweather, the historian, may perhaps be aware of this. His next possible/probable opponent is Miguel Cotto, and that seems like a fight that is too big to happen so soon. If it happened in May of 2008, there would be little time for build up. Less promotion means less money and less anticipation.

Unfortunately for fight fans there might be a long wait for another Mayweather fight. I think it is at least a year away. So I say let Floyd Mayweather pull a Jack Dempsey and take some time off from the game. Boxing needs Floyd's star power but the build up to mega fight is nearly as fun. Perhaps Floyd Mayweather will not capture the hearts of sports fans the way Jack Dempsey did. But at least he has our attention.

Questions or comments email: Raymond.markarian@yahoo.com