It may be the world's most famous arena, but Madison Square Garden has never been the most conventional.

Originally known as "PT Barnum's Monster Classical and Geological Hippodrome" the 125-year-old venue has staged its fair share of unusual events, so its hosting of a heavyweight unification bout between a Ukrainian and a Russian isn't that extraordinary.

Even so, Saturday's meeting of Wladimir Klitschko and Sultan Ibragimov would have seemed wholly inappropriate for the New York site less than a decade ago when Lennox Lewis and Evander Holyfield contested the most recent multi-title heavyweight fight.

Until last year, the infamous 1999 Lewis-Holyfield "draw" at the Garden marked the last time the arena was sold out for a boxing event. The ornate cost of doing business in New York coupled with the alluring site fess and complementary rooms offered by Las Vegas casino-hotels has seen a dramatic drop in the number of boxing shows at the sport's traditional home.

But three years ago, Bob Arum's Top Rank realized a winning formula for staging lucrative events at the Garden when 10,000 passionate multi-racial fans turned up on Puerto Rican Day to watch the Boricua Miguel Cotto dismantle Uzbekistan's Muhammad Abdullaev and the appearance of Irishman John Duddy on the undercard.

The following year Top Rank again tapped into the diverse ethnicity of New York by loading a card with Cotto, Duddy, Italian Paulie Malignaggi and Bobby Pacquiao of the Philippines. The attendance of 14,369 was nearly a thousand more than what American superstar Oscar De La Hoya attracted to the Garden six years beforehand.

"The show was constructed to appeal to one and all," says Top Rank's Lee Samuels. "There was something for everyone. I think we broke the record for flag waving."

Aided by a strong support bill that featured Cuba's Joel Casamayor and Mexican natives Antonio Margarito and Jose Armando Santa Cruz, last June's Cotto-Zab Judah event proved to be one of Arum's finest moments when over 20,000 filled the Garden for the first time in eight years.

"I want the people who are with me now to see how we did it in the old days, when we did major fights – Hagler-Hearns, Hagler-Duran – that had undercards that were as strong as steel," Arum told sportswriter Bernard Fernandez.

"It's easy to sit back and to overly rely on the casinos to bail you out. Why spend money on an undercard when all the media is going to write about is the main event? But to think that way is shortsighted."

The success of Top Rank's recent cards has reignited promoters' interest in the Garden, but not all boxing shows are certain to be financially rewarding. Last October's significant Don King-Duva Boxing heavyweight bout between Nigeria's Samuel Peter and American Jameel McCline drew a sparse attendance of little more than 7,000, resulting in a hollow atmosphere.

But K2 Promotions and Seminole Warriors Boxing believe their show on Saturday can be a huge financial success.

"We have priced tickets very reasonably [from $100-1000] and are on track to sell out the Garden," claims K2 Promotions' Tom Loeffler, who was involved in attracting 14,260 to the same arena for Klitschko's destruction of Calvin Brock in November 2006.

"We're ecstatic about the sales so far," adds Leon Margules of Seminole Warriors Boxing. "I think this reaction shows that when you put the two best heavyweights in the world in the ring together, the fans will respond."

While the quality of the matchup is relatively robust, sales are likely being driven by New York's strong Slavic community and the addition of John Duddy to the show. The Irishman will be returning to the Big Apple to face the Tunisian-born Canadian Walid Smichet.

Even though the targeting of minority communities has helped revitalize boxing at the Garden, the promotional tactic is not new, with some of the arena's most fabled nights featuring an assortment of ethnic minorities.

Such great occasions involving non-American fighters include the dramatic arrival of Panama's Roberto Duran onto the world stage in 1972 when he won the lightweight world title by stopping the Scot Ken Buchanan amidst a raucous din of Spanish and bagpipes.

Around the same time, Nigerian slugger Dick Tiger cemented his reputation as a Garden legend after grueling wars with Puerto Rico's Jose Torres and Nino Benvenuti of Italy.

In 1982, tragic Mexican legend Salvador Sanchez made his last in-ring appearance against the then-obscure Azumah Nelson of Ghana. Little was expected from Nelson, who had a record comprising just thirteen fights, but he gave the featherweight champion a torrid time en route to losing by stoppage in the fifteenth round.

Few members of the boxing media are expecting Klitschko-Ibragimov to be remembered as a classic, but the Garden does have a reputation for bringing out the best in fighters.

"In this room if you yelled the word 'Champ' you'd be trampled!" says boxing historian Bert Sugar.

"Wherever a boxer lived around the world, if ever he fought at Madison Square Garden, he either became a great name or he was always able to say afterwards that at least he did fight at the Garden," Ed Brophy, director of the International Boxing Hall of Fame, told ESPN.com.

With the return of substantial fight cards to the Garden and the attraction of partisan fans, television viewers will be offered a momentary respite from the dreary vibe that can dominate the usual Las Vegas broadcasts. Undercards at the major casinos are poorly attended, with high-rolling patrons habitually entering the arena just minutes before the headline fight, treating the event as a pit-stop on their night's entertainment.

Notes writer Thomas Hauser, "Fights in casinos attract customers; fights in New York attract fans."

From every background.