

## The Ides And Ends of Spring Fight Fever

Written by Phil Woolever  
Sunday, 13 April 2008 19:00

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PLANET BOXING – I agree with Antonio Tarver when he said boxing is “thriving” these days.

Long before March Madness roared in and out, the 2008 conking calendar had already filled up with enough duke out drama to stretch respectably into next winter.

Since I began compiling semi-quarterly state of the manly arts observational data a few years ago, things have continued to roll on petty well for a wide range of parties in the boxing game. In promotional, performance or personal fan based interests, bang for the buck is up.

The only April Fools I’ve noticed lately are in the dwindling chorus who still yelp about the impending death the dukes. There will always be some cheap seat doomsayers because there will always be a punching pastime.

Meanwhile, there was a great Saturday night of channel surfing for fight fans. USA broadcast giants HBO and Showtime continue to build upon gala fight scenes. You could switch back and forth and catch all the fights live without missing much actual action.

Near Pound for Pound best Miguel Cotto led a long line of excellent encounters on the sports’ smashing march into summer. Cotto shouldn’t have taken more than half the distance to collapse Alfonso Gomez with body shot combos, and he didn’t.

HBO’s co-featured Margarito - Cintron bout was another credible pairing with purpose. Comparative recent form almost guaranteed Margarito’s previous domination, and now he gets his shot at Cotto in July.

On Showtime, Antonio Tarver’s light heavyweight quartet dribbled down their own version of the week’s earlier final four hoopla. Clinton Woods may have had a strong outside shot coming in, but Tarver finally looked motivated again.

Chad Dawson should have used the age/mileage factor for the wide but unspectacular nod he was awarded over Glen Johnson, but Johnson should have earned just as many points. Dawson’s margin of victory seemed ridiculous. Granted there’s a huge difference in being there. From TV it looked to me like Johnson deserved to win what was an excellent battle.

There are fine cards all around our crazy globe these days. Call it Planet Boxing.

The run of solid fight action has stretched at least a couple years now, and still seems to be accelerating.

Fight of the Year so far I’ve seen live so far in 2008 is Manny Pacquiao - Juan Manuel Marquez 2. I can’t see any major battle topping Israel Vasquez’s raw but beautiful victory over Marquez’s brother Rafael. Still, more than one fight can reach the same zenith, and the horizon is bright.

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Pacquiao-Marquez 3 won't go down for a while. Pacquiao has plenty of time to do whatever he wants and everything he wants. Meanwhile, Marquez ain't getting any younger.

Promoters Bob Arum of Top Rank and Richard Schaeffer of Golden Boy see a third fight happening, but within vastly different time frames.

"We're shouldn't do a rematch immediately," stonewalled Arum, "You're not gonna do the same buys that we did tonight. That's the history. Marquez was not as popular, ever, as either Barrera or Morales. And yet the number (300,000 plus subscriptions) we did on this fight exceeded any (other) Pacquiao fight."

So Pacquiao is set for a return to the beautiful shores of Mandalay Bay against David Diaz in June. Something says Diaz shouldn't assume the opportunity is real until the first bell rings.

There's been a significant showdown like Casamayor – Katsidis or Peter – Maskaev practically every couple weeks.

Maybe there was too much romance in the air during February when Klitschko and Ibragimov hooked up. At least it was a unification match. Lately even those who can make Klitschko fight still haven't found a way to win, but his chin will be a crystal clear target until he decides to retire, probably as champ.

Kelly Pavlik's repeat notch over Jermain Taylor was somewhat anti-climactic. Still, Pavlik is a new star who initiates slugfests and fan frenzy. He's already set for an Atlantic City appearance versus Gary Lockett, then may get the winner of the rapidly approaching trans-Atlantic gala between Bernard Hopkins and Joe Calzaghe.

Also on the Pavlik card is technically gifted KO artist Juan Manuel Lopez challenging Daniel Ponce de Leon. Two-way carnage. Lopez KO 5, with a Round of the Year along the way.

Hopkins - Calzaghe could be one for the ages, or Dud of the Season. I'm leaning toward dud but would love to be wrong. Calzaghe in an ugly, split-waltz.

Oscar de La Hoya -Steve Forbes will be a great May 3rd spectacle, especially if they can fill the Cinco de Mayo stands as in Europe when Ricky Hatton or Calzaghe appears. Hatton is set to get the blokes singing again in England in May against Juan Lazcano

Unless Forbes flattens de la Hoya, we've already seen the Upset of the Year, when Carlos Quintana stunned Paul Williams. Williams, touted as one to watch in '08, gets his chance to prove it was a fluke on June 7th.

Nate Campbell's tagging tutorial over Juan Diaz was another technical treat.

In addition to piles of A level collisions coming off with a bang, there's been a consistently replenished slate of solid fights ahead like the upcoming Shane Mosley- Zab Judah or O'Neil Bell- Tomasz Adamek affairs.

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Paul Spadafora, Joan Guzman, Jorge Arce, Juan Urango, and Vincente Escobedo are just a few of the fighters waiting in the upcoming action wings.

Disappointing Jesus Soto-Karass met still dangerous Chris Smith this Friday and was lucky to get the decision. I had Soto-Karass as an early '08 breakout boy, but slick Germaine Sanders made their January waltz a lot tougher than it should have been, and now Smith made it two uninspiring performances in a row for Soto-Karass.

If Soto-Karass is really to scale the top of the hill, he's going to have to throw the non-stop combos he used to, and he's going to have to learn to block right hands.

There are all sorts of interesting characters making the quest. As usual, all sorts of interesting characters are paying attention.

If you count things like Everlast wear or Americana dialogue, there's also observational verification of widespread boxing PR.

Out side the stratosphere of Yankee Sox or Dodger regalia, in the southwest USA I've seen a lot more boxing glove themed accessories than anything but college jerseys.

Some of the most colorful team regalia arrives with Manny Pacquiao's colorful countrymen and their ringside banners. The odds of those fans getting serenaded by Hatton's traveling party aren't as long as you might think.

There's a decent chance that a Hatton-Pacquiao fight happens in '09, but not this year.

Sometimes I'll surf to an ESPN Classic replay like Marvin Hagler- John Mugabe that reminds me what the scene was like in the historic '80's era.

There's more neon flash on the Strip and in Times Square these days. Corporate juice is more apparent.

The scene was indeed classic back then. And the sport may have struggled since, but in many ways it's just as classic now.

2007 was an excellent year for boxing. So far, '08 is even better.

The upcoming months' mauling menu is prix fix primo and already comped.