

Trainers Duke It Out Before Fighters Do

Written by Ron Borges
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Talk is cheap and it is a good thing it is, or Jack Loew and Enzo Calzaghe would be working for free Saturday night in Atlantic City.

The respective trainers of middleweight champion Kelly Pavlik and his first challenger, Welshman Gary Lockett, have been talking up a storm for weeks now and it's been one with gale force winds and a lot of hot air behind it. Exactly why this has happened is difficult to fathom because the two fighters themselves could not have been more gentlemanly toward each other from the moment it was announced that the little known Lockett would replace Irish John Duddy as Pavlik's first challenger, a decision that at least kept the United Kingdom in the middleweight picture for a moment.

How long that moment will last is anyone's guess but the consensus is, as the Rev. Jeremiah Wright might put it, "How long? Not long!"

The undefeated Pavlik is a prohibitive favorite over the Welsh journeyman and perhaps that is what is behind all the yapping between Loew, who frankly started it, and the elder Calzaghe, a well-known hot head with a willingness to throw barbs when he feels his man is being slighted. One can only hope Lockett will match his trainer's willingness to trade with more than insulting words. If the latter is the case, Saturday night's showdown at Boardwalk Hall may not last long but it would at least be entertaining.

It always seems a bit out of place when trainers or managers exchange insults, whether they are directed at each other or their fighter's opponent, since none of them will have to back up what they say with anything more than a spit bucket.

What often seems to motivate such circumstances is the unexpressed but very real concern that one of the actual men doing the fighting may not be up to the task. One way to try and hide that marketing problem is to create a side issue, sort of like feinting to lure your opponent's attention away from what's really about to happen.

Loew began this exchange with Calzaghe when he inelegantly suggested, "Maybe Enzo Calzaghe can teach Lockett to slap like a girl - just like Joe (Calzaghe, Enzo's son and the reigning super middleweight and light heavyweight champion)."

That comment came on the heels of the younger Calzaghe slapping his way to victory against Bernard Hopkins and his father took the bait, lashing back about Loew's credentials and reminding him he'd just been named Trainer of the Year by the Boxing Writers Association of America, by the way, while Loew was out paving driveways in Youngstown.

"I had to go on the internet because I'd never even heard of this person Jack Loew," the elder Calzaghe said. "And all I found was that he paves driveways. Well, once Lockett has dealt with Pavlik and Loew is out of boxing then at least he can go back to paving driveways."

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“I’ve got no one to answer to. I’ve trained four world champions. I’ve got other champions in my gym. I won trainer of the year in America for 2007.”

He also has Lockett in his gym, a circumstance the world believes won’t enhance Calzaghe’s training reputation after Pavlik (33-0, 29 KO) is finished paving over his face in leather. Yet not even an effort to inspire seems likely to be the reason all this talking has taken place by two guys who won’t be throwing punches at each other or anyone else Saturday night on HBO.

Their aim, it seems to me, is to begin creating a demand that doesn’t really exist for a Pavlik-Calzaghe fight at 168 pounds, or thereabouts, by fall or winter. What better way to do it than to get their trainers talking in threatening ways followed by a leak from Pavlik’s promoter, Bob Arum, that he intends to try and negotiate such a fight once Pavlik dispenses with Lockett? Hey, it worked for Oscar De La Hoya and Floyd Mayweather, Jr., didn’t it?

Calzaghe and his promoter, Frank Warren, had already begun discussions with former four-time world champion Roy Jones, Jr. for a fight in England or Wales later this year that would seem to preclude a showdown between Lockett’s more well known stablemate and Pavlik. But nothing is signed and with Jones that means the likelihood of the event happening overseas is only slightly more than that Lockett (30-1, 21 KO) will find a way to escape the colonies in better shape than the redcoat army after George Washington was finished scrapping with it.

But for the momentum that began building for a light heavyweight title fight between Calzaghe and the aged Jones in the days leading up to Calzaghe-Hopkins to shift it would take the kind of outside the box promoting Loew and Calzaghe have begun. To try and turn this fight into something personal between them at the expense of Calzaghe’s father seems to be a pretty unvarnished effort to create the semblance of bad blood between two camps where none existed in the hope it will create a reason for fans to watch this fight and a larger reason to demand Lockett’s eventual conqueror will go on to challenge Enzo Calzaghe’s greatest creation – his own son.

“His last champ (WBO cruiserweight title holder Enzo MacCarinelli) was knocked out by David Haye,” Loew reminded. “Gavin Reese lost his welterweight title when he was knocked out in the 12th round. What the hell is he talking about?”

What the hell are either of them talking about would be the more interesting question. Loew and Calzaghe barely know each other and the latter was never insulting to the former in the smug way Emanuel Steward was in the weeks leading up to Pavlik’s challenge of the then Steward-trained Jermain Taylor.

So there can be no residual personal animosity behind these insults. Lockett is a considerable underdog and concedes that’s logical reasoning so perhaps this is merely a veiled effort to try and convince the larger public there’s a reason to watch Pavlik defend the title he won from Taylor for the first time despite the quality, or lack thereof, of his opponent?

Perhaps, but the real truth behind it all seemed to come out during one of Loew’s diatribes when he said, “This guy is attacking me and he’s got nothing on his plate. If Manny Steward did it, it’s

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different. He's trained 100 world champions. This guy has three and two just got knocked out."

After which Jack Loew added the telltale addendum that made the trainer's trash talking all the easier to understand.

"We're willing to move up to super middleweight," Loew said between insults. "It might be next year, it might be in October. Who knows? We're open to anything."

Indeed they are, including a little well placed trash talking among two guys who understand they can say what they want because on fight night they'll be safely tucked in the corners outside the ropes when the leather starts flying. More importantly perhaps, both understand that the big money for their best fighter lies with the other's.

Certainly Joe Calzaghe can draw big crowds anywhere in Britain and against most anyone. He would certainly do well with Jones financially if they meet. But they also understand options are the most important thing in prize fighting and creating at least the illusion of one between Calzaghe's son Joe and Pavlik is very good for business, even if the two trainers had to sound like white and Welsh versions of Floyd Mayweather, Sr. to do it.