We marvel at the fantastic fights men like Pacquiao, Marquez, Pavlik or Cotto provide for us, but tend to forget about the vulnerability of the sweet science. Mainstream sports such as the MLB, NFL, and the NBA have their faults, but the inefficiencies as leagues are less visible. Those leagues have schedules; set rules, players with annual salaries, coaches with a transparent set of duties, and team owners all working beneath one letterhead.

Yes, structure is another reason why these leagues are successful. For instance, basketball fans that enjoy the NBA finals know that the games will end in June and begin again in November. The NBA schedule has been established that way for years.

Boxing fans do not have the same luxury of a timetable. A boxing world without promoters like Don King, Golden Boy, and Top Rank could create absolute scheduling chaos. It's scary imagining a boxing world without promoters. Where would we turn to for big fights? Who would create the match ups, find the venue, sign the television contracts, and build interest?

Ironically, a boxing league similar to the mainstream format in major American team sports is in the final stages of development. The World Boxing League is an organization founded by former promoter turned entrepreneur Phil Penston.

Penston had an urge to create the boxing league ten years ago at a Julio Cesar Chavez event he co-promoted with Don King. Penston said, "I am sitting there next to Don King and Jose Sulaiman, the WBC President, and I say to myself, gee, it is really going to be hard making a living as a promoter when guys like Bob Arum, Don King, and all of these sanctioning bodies control the sport."

Instead of competing with the likes of Don King, Top Rank, Golden Boy Promotions, Penston, as well as league commissioner Jim Thomas, and a group of investors decided to take another route.

Their vision was simple, to begin a boxing league for the world to enjoy. But credibility was of essence. Penston, the league president, and company mulled what would make his league successful: How could the WBL prosper without essential guidelines and foundation? What would make fighters want to join the league? And how could the fan benefit?

The solutions the WBL powers that be came up include: shorter fights (five round bouts to be exact), a 16-week regular season, and six weight divisions. Since the year 2000, the WBL development team also created a blueprint to provide fighters with annual salaries, health benefits, steady work, retirement planning, and investment advice. Furthermore, none of the money the boxers earn will be taken from promoters, managers, or trainers.

According to Penston, many of the television companies that showcase boxing are already paying attention.

"We are in the process of selling teams," says Penston. "We have spoken with television stations about the league and they are very interested in our product. Jim and I have been traveling across the nation, up to Canada, and down to Mexico. And we have been talking to sports teams, casinos, and high networking individuals. We also got in touch with the boxing commissions, and acquired the necessary sponsorship."

Every event will have six fights, one representing each weight division. All referees, judges, and trainers will be employed by the league and there will be a very simple scoring methodology that awards five points for a knockout, four points for a TKO, three points for a unanimous decision victory, all the way down to zero for a loss.

The teams with the most accumulated point totals at the end of the season will compete in a playoff, culminating with the crowning of a champion. Once a national champion is crowned, the WBL will have the best fighters face off in a world cup like tournament to see who the best individual fighter in each league weight class is.

The World Cup participants will be determined by how many points they acquire for their respective teams.

"We want the fights to be action packed for the fans," says Penston. "But we won't be going after the Holyfield vs. Tyson or De la Hoya vs. Mayweather type of events. The sports league graveyard is littered with leagues that came out of the gate trying to compete with the more mature leagues, such as the USFL battling the NFL, for example. The USFL held the market pretty well and certainly competed for the Steve Young, Herschel Walker, and Jim Kelly's of the world and were really building an audience.

"But they tried to hard to compete with the more mature league and failed miserably. We think that our boxers are going to come from the 10th to 15th best boxers in the division on down. That represents about 98% of the boxers in the world. You and I both know that there are about five to fifteen boxers that get paid out there and the rest are not getting nearly the money the superstars get."

The WBL goal is not to surpass the already well-established game of boxing as we know it. However, they are merely here to bring a different element to the sport. The league already has the backing of boxing greats Angelo Dundee and Lennox Lewis, Penston says, and is rapidly moving towards a targeted March 2009 start date.

Entertainment value is vital to build interest, Penston says. The WBL plans to have an interactive type atmosphere similar to any other team sporting event. Penston says, "When you go to an NBA game or Arena Football, there is just so much there for the fan. There is a great deal of interaction and energy. During timeouts they have contests, or shows at halftime. In boxing, nothing happens in between bouts. You know, if you have a scheduled ten rounder and it ends in the second round, there is 45 minutes of dead time. There is no music, no lights, or pyrotechnics, there is just nothing there for the fan, in most cases."

During the bouts, the WBL fighters will wear specially made boxing gloves that measure the

speed and impact of every punch thrown. They will also be fighting under an open scoring format to enhance the sense of urgency.

This concept of the WBL can work, I believe. Creating a boxing league is a fresh idea, an adjustment from the sometimes skewed normalcy in the sport. However, revolutionizing the way the die hard fans enjoy watching boxing is a difficult task. The old 15 round fights and now 12 round fights are a big part of boxing history. The WBL will showcase five round fights. Will fight fans embrace change? Those classic 12 round bouts like the third Rafael Marquez vs. Israel Vazquez battle, or Trinidad vs. Vargas would be absent from the WBL, and that's unfortunate. On the other hand, a long boring fight like Wladimir Klitschko vs. Sultan Ibragimov, or many a Cory Spinks fight would be a no go. Instead the WBL approach is to have Pavlik vs. Taylor I, or early Mike Tyson type slugfests in the ring. So who is to say that fight fans will see the WBL with an open mind and the embrace the innovations?

Penston responds to the worry that traditionalists won't take to the tweaks. "We are not trying to replace the current format. I believe the marketplace will dictate how well this league performs. At the end of the day, the hard-core fans and older sports fan that love the sport, even they want change. The fans don't want to see fighters take rounds off, they want to see the action and excitement. That is why we came up with the five round format. What we really want to do is start out with an Arena Football type of league then eventually grows to the size of the NFL, MLB or NBA. You know, boxing is the second most participated sport in the world behind soccer. In Europe it's huge, in Asia, it's huge. That is why we think the WBL can be successful."

"I also believe this: if boxing has a very similar structure to other sports leagues and you're a 14 year old Ray Lewis, you're a good athlete, and you say I could make a right and go into baseball, I could make a left, and go into football, or I could go straight ahead and make good money in boxing. Then, we are going to get some really good athletes in the sport. Ali was a great athlete, he looked so good in the ring, Leonard was a great athlete, and he looked so good in the ring, now we have guys like Butterbean fighting. I mean, there is nothing there for the fan. I think in the end, we will get the better athletes."

Maybe the WBL cannot shift the boxing winds overnight. But a league with proper structure has the ability to bring a breath of fresh air to the boxing world that quite honestly can come off as stale to the younger generations.

"Boxing deserves more respect than it's getting," Penston says. "We all want things to go back to the way there were, in many regards, during the glory days of boxing. The WBL gives it opportunity to bring boxing back to where it once was, on the world stage. If you run it like a business and put it in your hip pocket, we might be able to have something here."