

Even For Boxing, It Was Sad

Written by Ron Borges

Wednesday, 25 June 2008 19:00

It was exactly what everyone feared it would be, although the choice of words to describe it depended on your point of view...or your level of kindness.

To some, it was sad beyond measure.

To others, it was a joke.

To hard-core boxing aficionados, it was a travesty.

To opponents of boxing, it was a dangerous octogenarian circus and another advertisement for the sport's abolition.

To anyone with any knowledge of the grand and sometimes grotesque history of prize fighting, it was about the money because sad comebacks are always about the money.

Yet to no one was it a surprise; boxing, it seems, is incapable of surprising any more when it comes to the level of disgrace it is willing to heap upon itself.

Personally, though, sad will do well enough.

What else can you say, really, about the "comeback" of 49-year-old Azumah Nelson and 44-year-old Jeff Fenech Tuesday night in Melbourne, Australia? There stood two doddering old goats, shadows of the warriors they once had been, imitating a faded memory. Sad.

Once each had won world titles in three weight classes and fought so well for so long they were elected to the International Boxing Hall of Fame but the guys carrying their names into the ring at the Vodafone Arena in front of a crowd of around 6,000 people who should have known better than to attend looked like the grandfathers of those guys.

It would be fine for these two old coots to meet in a pub or a restaurant or at some celebration of their grand careers but the only reason either should be inside a boxing ring at their ages would be to shake the hands of young prize fighters who hoped one day to accomplish all that Nelson and Fenech had in their youth, or as trainers.

But to be left alone with each other in shorts and leather mittens at their age was criminal. It was a fraud perpetrated on an apparently willing public that at first bought into the idea that this might really be a third fight between the two of them even though it had been 16 years since Nelson beat the tar out of Fenech in this same city in a rematch the latter has never been able to forget.

The bigger fraud, though, was the one they perpetrated upon each other. One of them, you would have thought, should have known better than to embark on what was all but guaranteed

Even For Boxing, It Was Sad

Written by Ron Borges

Wednesday, 25 June 2008 19:00

to be an embarrassment but they did not.

Once Nelson was known as “The Terrible Warrior,” one of the most apt nickname’s in boxing history if you ever saw the African champion in his heyday. Tuesday night he was just terrible, an old man throwing a few punches and being hit by a few thrown by a guy landing in a way that led someone in the crowd to holler at one point, “Give him a kiss, Jeffrey!”

After eight rounds of mauling and milling around as the crowd hooted, Fenech decided to run. Believing he had the decision won and well aware that his ribs were killing him for some reason he’d had enough of fighting. And so he ran. Jogged, would be a more apt description, not that mattered because Nelson couldn’t catch him at any speed, probably including neutral.

The more they ran and chased each other the more the crowd booed, insulting two men who once would have struck pure terror into the hearts of everyone doing the catcalling if they even snarled in their direction.

“I know it wasn’t the old Jeff Fenech,” Fenech said after winning a majority decision by taking two judges’ cards at 96-94 while the third called the fight a draw. “Hopefully I was a little bit smarter.”

Wrong on both counts. Indeed it was the old Jeff Fenech. Or at least an old Jeff Fenech. Smart? Not hardly. To try and recapture the past after retirements of more than a decade is never smart. It is to court embarrassment or worse. Fortunately for Fenech and Nelson all they got this time was the former, although that was bad enough.

A boxing ring is no place to grow old. It is no place to chase after faded glory, either. Nearly everyone who ever tried ends up either on their back, in the hospital or, as was the case with Jeff Fenech and Azumah Nelson, being booed for their incompetence at a sport they once mastered.

If that isn’t sad I ask you this: then what is?