Written by Robert Mladinich
Saturday, 28 June 2008 19:00

Heavyweight contender Brian “The Beast” Minto of Butler, Pennsylvania, is not the promoter of record but he is the financial backer for July 2nd fight against “Big” John Poore at Pullman Park, an outdoor baseball stadium in Minto’s hometown.

Not only has the fight been sold out for weeks, it will also be the main event on ESPN 2’s Wednesday Night Fights. The low-key and sensible Minto admits to having some initial jitters about putting his own money up, but realizes now that fortune favors the bold.

“I’m blessed to have a sellout,” said the 33-year-old Minto, whose record stands at 30-2 (19 KOS). “Boxing is a hard business to make money in. We’ve sold 3,000 tickets and there is still a big demand. I wish we had 5,000 tickets to sell.”

Throughout his career Minto has shown a willingness to take on significant challenges. While Poore, a former Toughman competitor from Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, might not be considered world class material, he is a big puncher, as his 20-2 (18 KOS) record will attest.

“He is a good opponent for TV,” said Minto. “He’s a tough guy with a lot of punching power. I don’t underestimate anyone, and I prepare for everyone equally.”

Minto’s sensational tenth round knockout over Vinny Maddalone in July 2004 gave him instant credibility as someone to watch. In his very next fight, however, he lost a split decision to the aging but still savvy Tony Tubbs.

He has since rebounded with another stoppage of Maddalone, as well as a sixth round TKO victory over Axel Schulz in Germany and three first round knockouts in his last three fights.

Prior to the latest winning streak, all of which took place at the Mountaineer Casino Race Track & Resort in Chester, West Virginia, Minto lost a unanimous decision to Luan Krasniqi in Germany.

“I thought I outworked him, but the judges didn’t agree,” said Minto.

Ironically, in Minto’s most impressive victory to date, against Schulz, he says he broke his thumb two and half weeks prior to the bout.

“I couldn’t put a glove on until two days before the fight,” he explained. “Schulz hadn’t been in the spotlight for a while and he seemed a little nervous. Even with my injury, I was able to exploit that.”

Around that time, Minto was also embroiled in a well-publicized breakup with promoter Dino Duva. After many back and forth threats, he has become a free agent, or what he describes as a “freelance heavyweight.”

"Nothing against Dino personally, but Dino's about Dino," said Minto. "He's got a nice family, but he didn't do the right thing and follow our contract. He wasn't looking out for my best interests."

One person who Minto says has been looking out for his best interests throughout his career is manager and agent Pat Nelson. "A lot of people talk bad about him, but there is a lot of jealousy in boxing," explained Minto. "There are a lot of thieves in boxing, but Pat is not one of them."

Minto hopes that a televised victory over Poore will lead to a title shot sooner rather than later. Although he is 5'11" tall and about 220 pounds, he is more than willing to fight any of the behemoth heavyweights who dominate the division these days.

"I didn't put all of this work into my career to be a second tier fighter," said Minto. "I train to get to the elite level where I can make some real money. Wladimir Klitschko is very good at using his size to keep smaller heavyweights away, but everyone can be beat. He's already shown that he can be beat."

Minto has already lobbied to get former cruiserweight champion David Haye, who has since moved up to the heavyweight division, into the ring.

"That didn't materialize," said Minto. "I wouldn't mind getting a fight with someone like Andrew Golota, but I don't want to sign my life away to a promoter."

With the right deal, Minto says he would be willing to sign on with a promoter, but right now realizes how unfeasible that would be. As the financial backer of the July 2 fight, he is making more than double what he would have made if he was fighting for someone other than himself.

"I'll just keep doing what I'm doing, and hope that I can sneak up on someone," said Minto. "Right now I'm happy with the way my career is going."

How could he not be? The July 2 fight will be held in a retro ballpark that will remind those present of the great fights of yesteryear that took place at the Polo Grounds and Yankee Stadium.

Now that the fight is sold out, Minto needs not concentrate on such logistics as the costs associated with constructing a canopy in the event of rain or all of the other items that can drive a promoter or financial backer crazy. All he has to do is focus on beating Poore, and then elevating himself to the next level.

What makes this fight even more interesting is the fact that it will take place in Butler, a small town that is located about 40 miles from Pittsburgh, which is a major metropolis. Amazingly, being close to Pittsburgh had nothing to do with the success of the promotion.

"We don't need Pittsburgh," explained Minto. "All we needed was Butler to make this show a success."

Asked if he was nervous about fighting in front of such a large hometown crowd, Minto said he was not.

“Against Schulz there were about 15,000 people in attendance,” he explained. “With Krasniqi, there were 10,000 to 12,000. I didn’t let those (hostile) crowds play into my emotions. The hometown crowd will only fire me up.”

Another source of inspiration is the fact that the Poore fight will also serve as a fundraiser for autism awareness. Minto’s son Matthew, 6, is afflicted with that condition but has made great strides in recent years. He and his wife Heidi also have a daughter named Megan, who is 8.

“We were able to get our son good services and he is functioning very well,” said Minto. “He has made light years of progress, and he is now going to kindergarten in a regular classroom setting. Autism is an epidemic, with 1 in 90 kids having it. It needs to be researched and addressed.”

It is obvious that the sensible Minto is fighting for much more than a chance to win a world title. Although this is the biggest moment of his career from a professional perspective, he is as motivated by his son’s condition as he is by the challenge of pleasing his hometown crowd and making back more money than he has invested in this promotion.

“I’ve been blessed by my ability to make a living out of boxing,” said Minto. “It was great to fight in Germany and the Mountaineer has treated me very well. I’ve made decent money, and I’ve been smart with my money.

“I live for the future, not just for today,” he continued. “Within a year I hope to fight for the heavyweight championship of the world. I think I’ve earned the right to do that.”