Boxing is in a state of emergency, they say. A sport that has lost its edge, they whisper. Boxing is a dying sport, they believe. Well, tell that to the twenty-seven members of the Millennium High School Boxing Club, in Tracy, California.

Sadly for the youth, boxing can be a difficult sport to follow. Since all the best, or the most well known fighters compete on pay cable programming outlets, those adolescents that do not have the luxury of ordering a PPV or shelling out a monthly payment for HBO or Showtime are almost naïve to all that is happening in the sport.

It can be argued that boxing is like an unknown foreign language to young kids.

Ironically, the essential element to keep any sport afloat in the future would be to not only draw more athletes, but to strengthen the fan base.

The hope of the sport is in the youth. And the last time I checked, there is not a person in charge of the boxing marketing department.

Therefore I took it upon myself to begin a Boxing Club at the high school where I work as an English instructor.

The Boxing Club at Millennium High School will be my voice to the youth saying, 'Boxing is a beautiful sport that captivates us, showcasing competition at its core essence.'

History is an important portion of success in sports. As in the rest of life, in sports, nderstanding the past is the greatest way to prepare for the future. Introducing our young minds to classic fights would help them appreciate boxing.

Clearly, those that are at the greatest risk of losing faith (if they even develop a preference in the sport at all) in the sport of boxing are the next generation. How could we expect growth in boxing if the stars are not easily accessible to eyeballs? The goal of the Boxing Club is to instill a boxing culture within our youth, and encourage them to understand the sport. The Boxing Club does not teach teenagers how to fight, it teaches them to appreciate the game.

With the Boxing Club, I thought it would be best to give a little back to the sport that has given me the most pleasure. Here is my chance as a boxing devotee, to make a difference. Building boxing fans at a young age, like they were thoroughbred champions. No, promoters King, Arum, De La Hoya, I will not ask you all for a promotional fee!

MHS Club Day is every Wednesday. I had the idea to show one fight per week. Students that enjoy a De la Hoya vs. Vargas fight one week, and a Pavlik vs. Taylor fight the next, will have a few of the essential tools to become a boxing fan.

And I wanted to have an open forum for discussion about any other classic showdown. For example, we will discuss the lead up to the first Tyson vs. Ruddock fight at the beginning of class. Then, next time, begin an argument about why Richard Steele made the decision to stop the Meldrick Taylor vs. Julio Cesar Chavez fight, two seconds before the end of the 12th round.

At MHS, each teacher had an opportunity to begin a club of their liking. There were instructors that began a club for chess, fantasy football, rock n' roll, science and cosmetology.

Before club signups began, and the idea of launching a boxing club for the sole purpose of watching, and appreciating boxing, started to make its rounds around the school. Among staff and students alike, there was palpable skepticism.

"A boxing club would be a great idea," said the English teacher Mr. Reyes. "But, I would think about showing some MMA fights as well. The students are really into the UFC."

"Sure, the fights are cool, but I do not know who anyone is," said Chris Acosta, the ninth grade student that seemed more enthuses to join the Boxing Club than others, when speaking about the sport. "I like Mike Tyson. Can we watch the fight where he bites off the guy's ear? What was his opponent's name again, Ed?"

"His name is Evander Holyfield," I said as we both looked at each other in confusion.

Chris' excitement to watch the Tyson debacle in his rematch against Evander Holyfield in 1997 incited inetrest amongst the crowd of students that gathered around the lunch tables during MHS Club signup day.

The overall student excitement for a fight that ended in such a bizarre fashion was cause for concern, for me at least. It got me thinking. Is this how low boxing has come? Is the sport a mere circus act to all the young people of the world? Is the lasting memory of the sport of boxing a temper tantrum from a man that completely lost his marbles?

Here is a thought. When young basketball fans think of the NBA, is their first recollection "the brawl" between the Pacers and Pistons in 2004? No way. Therefore the appreciation for the beauty of the sweet science, outside of the cusp of us diehards, is scant.

On club signup day, I quietly stood by myself near one of the lunch tables facing the oncoming student traffic jam that was about to ensue. I held a sign that read:

"Boxing Club: No Fighting, Only Watching"

The school rule was: every high school student on campus had to join a club. Therefore my chances of having an enthusiastic boxing group were strong. I was hoping to get about thirty people in the room each week.

However, the anticipation by the students was unclear to me. But, by the next morning, news had spread about the Boxing Club. Club president, sophomore Bhavik Minstry, made a flyer to

pass out to his classmates. I made fifty copies of the flyer, and the word was out by lunch time.

"BOXING CLUB IN MR. MARKARIAN'S CLASS

NO FIGHTING!!!

ONLY WATCHING BOXING MOVIES!!!

Initially, twenty-seven students signed up. I have to admit that I was proud. By week two, the group was down to twenty, but who's counting.

Before day one, my reasoning for the lack of fans in boxing was simple: people are not exposed to the best fights. You see, the hardcore boxing fans can easily indentify the Barrera/Morales and Vazquez/Marquez thrillogies as instant classics. But, much of the American youth (I emphasize American because boxing is more popular outside of the United States) do not have a clue about who in the hell to follow.

Week One:

First fight shown: Manny Pacquiao vs. Juan Manuel Marquez I

I did not attempt much discussion during the first week. I wanted to see if there were any true boxing fans out there. Were the students there just to hang out with their friends or were they actually ready to watch an entertaining scrap?

During the first week, I pressed play on the DVD and sat back in silence. Surely, Pacquiao's three knockdown first round followed by Marquez's impressive comeback would keep everyone on the edge of their seats. However, the reviews were mixed. Evidently, a twelve round boxing match that ended in a draw was not a good idea to break in the crowd. Maybe I should have chosen a Mike Tyson quickie.

Be as it may, I noticed this group wanted a slugfest. But, I still was not "completely" convinced.

Week Two:

Fight of the Week: Oscar De la Hoya vs. Fernando Vargas

In an attempt to gain some exposure, I placed some flyers all over the school. I wanted people to know that the Boxing Club is showing an Oscar De la Hoya fight. Before the fight, I told everyone about the history of hatred between Vargas and De la Hoya.

I explained to the club that Vargas despised De la Hoya since they were kids, practically dedicated his life to defeating Oscar De la Hoya in the ring, and "unknowingly" ingested some steroids before the fight.

It was maybe the Golden Boy's toughest fight, I told them. And the crowd was hooked. De la

Hoya nearly falling through the ropes in round one had some people startled. Then, at the end of the fight there was a lovely expression of enthusiasm. I rewound Oscar's 11th round knockdown punch at least five times because the B.C. enjoyed the action.

Week two was a step in the right direction.

Week Three:

Fight of the Week: Riddick Bowe vs. Andrew Golota II

I knew the club was starving for some knockout action so I dug deep into my fight collection to find one of the finest heavyweight wars in recent memory. Jim Lampley compared the fight to a Rocky movie numerous times during the fight. And, neither fighter was ever the same afterwards. Although the fight did not end in the typical knockout fashion, the atmosphere surrounding the event, and the heavy blows exchanged by both fighters was enough to get my blood heated.

Again, I explained to the group why Bowe and Golota were fighting a rematch in order to give the students a proper perspective. I Youtubed the riots at the end of Bowe and Golota's first fight and tried to draw the battle lines between the two combatants the best way I could.

Week three was a success. People were starting to enjoy the Boxing Club. George Lopez, a freshman student that is almost as funny as the comedian of the same name, told me that "it was the best fight we have watched so far." Jose Rubio, probably the most focused member of the bunch, stated that Bowe vs. Golota was the best fight that he had ever seen.

Mr. Snell, the man I like to call the computer wizard on campus, noticed the "Fight of the Week" sign on the wall and showed some interest. Students that were not in the club asked me who won the fight. And others came up to me saying that they heard the Polish guy (Golota) kept hitting Bowe below the belt.

Week Four:

Fight of the Week: TBA

I am not really sure which fight to show next. But the curiosity for the club is building. And the pressure is on. I cannot disappoint. I am thinking about showing Vargas vs. Trinidad, or maybe Tyson vs. Holyfield I. Either way, the Boxing Club is making a difference one fight at a time.

Boxing is dead? Well, maybe it's a little frail, but there is a glimmer of hope for a rebirth at the Millenium High School in Tracy, California.