

Who-da-thunkit? Promoters As Partners!

Written by Ron Borges

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Boxing is not a team sport. Neither is the business of boxing. Joe DeGuardia and Art Pelullo are trying to change that.

The rival East Coast promoters recently decided to team up to direct the career of 2008 U.S. Olympian Demetrius Andrade, the Providence-born junior middleweight who will make his pro debut Oct. 23 at an Indian casino outside Spokane, Wash., more than 3,000 miles from his home base.

Andrade is considered by most observers to be the best pro prospect to emerge from this year's disappointing Olympic effort and there was no shortage of promoters pursuing him. The leader from the outset was DeGuardia but Pelullo had begun to pursue Andrade, his interest piqued after he first saw him at a national tournament in Chicago.

DeGuardia realized this could easily devolve into a bidding war that would not serve either of them so he hit upon a different approach. He called on Pelullo rather than calling him out.

"I made a sizeable push to sign him," DeGuardia said. "Then I picked up the phone and called Artie. I knew I was No. 1 and he was No. 2 and I just suggested 'Let's do it together.'

"This is a rare occurrence in boxing. Usually a fighter has one promoter but this is testament to how we feel about Demetrius."

When DeGuardia called, Pelullo was at first surprised but he quickly came to believe perhaps this was an idea whose time had come, radical though it might seem.

"I didn't know he was looking as much as I was," Pelullo said. "Joe called me. He said he had a jump on Demetrius but why not try to do this together.

"Neither one of us is an ego maniac. I thought it was a good idea working together. We each do about 20 (televised) shows a year all over America. Between us we can get Demetrius a lot of exposure and any disagreements we have over opponents or dates I just feel I can sit down at dinner and work them out with a reasonable man."

DeGuardia, in fact, suggests this may be what the future holds for boxing promoters as television dates shrink and opportunities to showcase and develop a young talent become more difficult to find.

The New York-based promoter feels shared moves like this could soon become the wave of the future for a troubled sport fighting to survive.

"I believe this is where boxing has to go," DeGuardia said. "If we want to make an impact in the sport we need to work together. Every sport works together. Only in boxing does everyone work

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as a separate entity.

“Every business has clashes with egos. It exists. But they find ways to work together. This is an experiment to show if this works (in boxing).”

Andrade and his father, Paul, who manages and trains him, believe having two promoters will not produce double the problems but rather double the opportunity. The way they see it, all having two promoters should do is double their chances of fighting regularly on televised shows that will allow boxing fans around the country to watch Andrade grow as a professional.

“What does the average promoter do, one fight a month?” Paul Andrade said. “If they have six, seven, 10 fighters you’re not going to get six fights a year.

“With two promoters you could end up with six TV shows a year between them. We believe it will work.”

It might but while rival promoters agree working together might be a wise direction to turn, skepticism abounds.

“I think it’s an important idea,” said Lou DiBella, who promotes WBC welterweight champion Andre Berto, former middleweight champion Jermain Taylor and Paulie Malignaggi among others. “The way the industry is going there needs to be more strategic partnerships like this.

“Promoters certainly need to work together but I don’t think you’re going to see this a lot. It’s difficult because we’re competitors too. There’s no question our business model has to change because the business model is smaller but I’m not sure this is an easy way to try and do it.”

Veteran Philadelphia based promoter J. Russell Peltz is even more skeptical. Although he too agrees that the boxing business has become a more difficult business landscape in which to operate he is skeptical that a partnership like the one between DeGuardia and Pelullo can work for long.

“I think that’s a tough road they’re on,” Peltz said. “Promoters don’t really get along and they never have so I don’t know if this can work or not but based on boxing history it won’t.

“Boxing promoters spend most of their time wishing other promoters harm. It’s always amazed me when a promoter has a hard time or his fighter is beaten how other promoters are happy about it. They bask in that. They’re all jealous.

“In the NFL they share their revenue. They may have egos and they may have rivalries but they do collective bargaining and they understand that if all the teams do well it’s to their benefit.

“Boxing has always operated the opposite of that. If Artie and Joe can get along and if their matchmakers can get along maybe it can work but boxing history is not in their favor.

“I guess they’ll both be on their Ps and Qs because this is a valuable commodity. Andrade is a

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hot prospect so maybe they can work together on this. But not slitting each other's throats will be the big "if."

Only time will tell if DeGuardia's Grand Experiment works in partnership with Pelullo but they both agree that it's time for cooperation in boxing. The question is whether the sport of confrontation is ready for such a radical notion.