

Ron Borges' 2009 Wish List

Written by Ron Borges
Monday, 05 January 2009 19:00

Boxing officially begins the New Year this week and while the sport continues to have its problems there remains much to be hopeful about.

Frankly, the biggest hope may be the faintest. It is that some heavyweight finally emerges from the dark cloud that has enveloped the division for so long and finally captures the imagination of the public. It has been so long since Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield, Riddick Bowe and, to a lesser extent, Lennox Lewis thrilled fight fans that one begins to wonder if the heavyweight division still exists.

This is not simply because all the reigning title holders are European (the Brothers Klitschko and Nikolay Valuev) although in a country as parochial as the United States that doesn't help. It is rather that which ever one you're watching at any given moment convinces you he's worse than the guy you saw before him, who you were quite sure had to be the worse guy in the division. This is not a good thing for boxing.

The hope here then is that some time this year the brash Brit David Haye, the former cruiserweight champion who has charisma, crushing power and a cracked chin emerges to win one or more portions of the title and ends up in a showdown with Klitschko the Younger (Wladimir). That would at least be a fight of interest and if Haye found a way to win it, his personality alone would help revive the sport.

In this country the division will never really matter again until someone in red, white and blue becomes both a legitimate challenger and a fearsome puncher and that isn't happening any time soon judging by the pretenders out there at the moment, but Haye would be a bombastic breath of fresh air...assuming his chin doesn't implode when struck with authority by a true heavyweight. That may be a tall order but he has the kind of concussive one-punch power that can counter even a chin made of limestone...at least until the night someone hits him flush so we have to hope for the best there, but that's part of what makes him interesting.

The news that promoter Bob Arum has found a new Spanish language television station for the boxing shows he used to showcase on Telefutura until that network pulled the plug at the end of the year was welcome, but do you have Azteca America on your cable lineup? At this point, it's better than nothing, but it's a step down from the "Solo Boxeo" shows and seems another warning sign that if the people making the most money off the sport don't begin to invest some of it back into the game at the grassroots level one of these days boxing will be like Oklahoma in the '30s – a dust bowl.

But wait a minute! This was supposed to be about good news so I digress. If 2009 is to be a good year for prize fighting the first thing the sport needs is a return of its greatest practitioner of the day – Floyd Mayweather, Jr. His self-imposed exile has achieved what he hoped – it cost his father a lot of money he would have made preparing Oscar De La Hoya to try and beat his son in a rematch. Now it's time to get back to work in the hopes that he will face the winner of

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the Manny Pacquiao-Ricky Hatton fight in May, assuming it comes off as planned.

It seems Mayweather is too fast for Pacquiao and Pacquiao's trainer, Freddie Roach, really has no interest in the fight but wasn't Oscar De La Hoya too big for him? Not!

It is that kind of mystery and fodder for debate that fuels interest in a sport like boxing and so Mayweather's return is crucial. So, too, is it that Pacquiao defeat Hatton spectacularly. If he does, Pacquiao may have no real choice but to face Mayweather because there will be a clamoring for that fight – a pound-for-pound showdown between Mayweather and the man who replaced him as that mythical champion – Pacquiao.

Frankly, I'd be just as happy to see Pacquiao face Juan Manuel Marquez a third time to unify the lightweight title though, assuming Marquez survives what could be a tough challenge from former champion Juan Diaz this year.

Diaz is neither as skilled nor as fast as Marquez but he is a relentless warrior who will make it a fight. If Marquez wins, a third match with Pacquiao would be one of the 2009 highlights because their first two matches were the kind of classics fight fans still argue about because no one can say for sure who won.

Speaking of lightweights, one would hope the sport is smart enough to get Nate Campbell into the mix as well because he is both a guy who can fight and an entertainer and there is a shortage of both around these days. Campbell, Pacquiao, Marquez and Diaz could fight a year long round robin and it would be compelling TV, although don't count on it because it would make too much sense.

Like many fight fans, I could watch Israel Vazquez and Rafael Marquez fight every Friday night and be well satisfied but I'd like to see undefeated young Juan Manuel Lopez, Edwin Valero, Joan Guzman and even aging Joel Casamayor get into that mix as well. Get them all fighting each other and you've got good fights and growing interest if properly promoted and showcased.

Word is Paul Williams will end up fighting the well used up and seldom pleasing Winky Wright next. Explain to me why this is happening beyond the fact that Wright has connections with Golden Boy Promotions? Fans of actual fighting have little interest in seeing Wright any more and they didn't have all that much interest when he was at the height of his skills. So why risk Williams, who has great potential, in what can't be anything but a stinker fight?

Anyone who is paying attention understands HBO climbed in bed with Golden Boy some time ago but that match is ridiculous and does boxing no good. Williams against middleweight champion Arthur Abraham would for a lot of reasons and that's where the promotional effort should be made but it's not going to happen any time soon.

Despite the sad night Kelly Pavlik had against Bernard Hopkins he's back defending his middleweight title early this year and one has to hope that Pavlik, Williams, Abraham and the often ducking Felix Sturm, who apparently hasn't seen a leading middleweight contender his

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management wants him to fight, could create some buzz for that division if they'd just square off with each other and settle a few things.

That's what makes the Vic Darchinyan-Jorge Arce Feb. 7 showdown on SHOWTIME exciting. It not only will be a concussive contest in which judges will not be necessary but counting to 10 will be, it's also a reminder that a guy like Darchinyan, who beat down Cristian Mijares in his last outing and is now taking on more heavy iron in Arce, is what drives boxing. At its best, the fight game is about confrontations between equals, not mismatches of young vs. aged, or talented vs. not so much. That is what we've gotten time and again in recent years and, frankly, the sport can't take much more of it.

This brings me to Shameless Shane Mosley vs. Antonio Margarito. Why are we doing this? Mosley couldn't draw flies when he was young and a dominant lightweight. Now he's old, not dominant and appears to be heading for a fall if he keeps pushing his luck against Victor Conte and the BALCO scandal. It's pretty obvious reading stories by folks with access to Mosley's grand jury testimony that he's a cheat and he knew it. So why does he get rewarded with a Margarito fight while Barry Bonds can't get a job as a DH? Because it's boxing, that's why.

There are several things one should want to see this year, including the emergence of a challenger who doesn't carry an AARP card for light heavyweight champion Chad Dawson, a rematch between cruiserweight champion Tomasz Adamek and Steve Cunningham on a network willing and able to showcase them, a rematch with Margarito for Miguel Cotto (assuming he really wants one) and a match between Jermain Taylor and Mikkel Kessler.

I wouldn't mind seeing a bit more of Michael Katsidis too, even though his defense is worse than Stephon Marbury's. I'd like to not see Joe Calzaghe, who has no reason to press on, and I'd like to see a bit less waist line on heavyweight hopeful Chris Arreola. I'd like to see Don King use his considerable promotional gifts to make something big out of the talented but barely known Devon Alexander and wouldn't it be great if the Western world got to know featherweight champion Chris John? Right now he's a myth to most people, an Indonesian we know can fight but who is seen in the U.S. by so few people one begins to wonder if he's really Sid Finch.

One of the beautiful things about boxing is when fresh faces start to rise. This could be the year for Victor Ortiz, Yuriorkis Gamboa, James Kirkland and the slow moving but talented Andre Ward. It's also, we should all hope, the year young welterweight champion Andre Berto becomes a household name because he's got the talent, the smile and the personality to become a star if he can get some exposure and the right fights.

In fact, as critical as I've been about Mosley, a proposed Berto-Mosley fight made sense because it could have been the classic case of the young star on the rise doing so at the expense of someone who used to be somebody but is now less of that than he once was. With Mosley unavailable, maybe promoter Lou DiBella should consider putting Berto in with Zab Judah, who is another guy who, like Mosley, still has some talent but is walking on the shady side of the street and so would be a good, hard test for Berto.

It's the kind of fight Berto should win if he is who we think he is but it would also be the kind of

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hard test a young fighter needs to fulfill his true potential in sport's harshest landscape.

Oh, by the way, wouldn't you love to see another meeting between Kendall Holt and Ricardo Torres this year? Who knows what will happen but one thing is sure – somebody is going to end up on the floor. Let the winner fight Tim Bradley and the junior welterweights would be alive and kicking too.

The point in all this is to urge the people who finance the fights, profit from the fights and make or break fighters and the fight game – HBO, SHOWTIME, Setanta and Sky in England, ESPN, German promoters Peter Kohl and Wilfried Sauerland, England's Frank Warren and the U.S.' Richard Schaefer, Bob Arum, Don King, Lou DiBella, Dan Goossen, Art Pelullo and Joe DeGuardia – to dedicate one year of their life to a sport that has made all their lives far more comfortable than most of the fans who they keep asking to support them regardless of what they give them back.

Readers, please feel free to add your wish list for the Boxing Year 2009, and beyond, via a comment...