

De La Hoya Hears It From The Boobirds

Written by Raymond Markarian
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During the HBO BAD event in San Jose this past weekend, I witnessed one of the strangest scenes in my 27 years of existence as a sports fan. Oscar De la Hoya was booed... and booed loudly.

De la Hoya was not only mocked when he walked into the ring to congratulate his fighter, James Kirkland, on a knockout victory. The Los Angeles native was ridiculed by the thousands in attendance each time his name was mentioned by the ring announcer.

At most boxing events, there is plenty of downtime in between bouts. So, instead of watching a mascot jump through a hula-hoop, boxing fans have a choice to run to the concession stand, or sit and stare at the ring announcer stand alone inside of the ring until the next fight begins.

In order to bring a rise out of the crowd, the ring announcer points out notable celebrities in the audience. On that night, men like Lennox Lewis, Harold Lederman, and local favorite Andre Ward were in attendance at The Tank in San Jose, Ca, and all received a warm applause.

When it was De la Hoya's turn to be presented, the crowd was not pleasant.

As the elephant in the room was being introduced, jeering was immediate. De la Hoya left his seat and awkwardly walked towards the squared circle. When he slipped between the ropes, wearing a tight black leather jacket, and casual jeans, it felt like I was witnessing Barry Bonds rounding the bases at Dodger Stadium. The guy did not even leave the neutral corner. You would suspect a notable boxing celebrity to stand in the center of the ring in a tipping-of-a-cap-type of appearance.

But De la Hoya just walked between the ropes raised his hand halfway for a few seconds, heard the despising crowd jeer his name, and went back down the steps that entered the ring.

What a difference a decade makes. In 1999, Oscar De la Hoya was a media darling. The most popular fighter in boxing at the time was a crossover star, an aspiring musician, and his boxing career was booming, fresh off a comeback victory against the undefeated Ike Quartey.

But in 2009 the Golden Ticket is seen as damaged goods in the eyes of a portion of the boxing community.

It was difficult to determine whether the crowd in San Jose was upset about his last performance, an 8th round knockout loss to Manny Pacquiao or they finally saw through the past few years of Oscar De la Hoya's fighting career and felt cheated.

Since that gut check against Quartey, De la Hoya's record is 9-6. That is not exactly a resume of an elite fighter. But he was and still is probably the most popular figure in the sport today.

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Should we blame him for losing against the pound for pound elite? Probably not... over the last ten years, De la Hoya has lost three times to the men that were at the time, considered to be the top P4P fighters in the world (Hopkins, Mayweather, and Pacquiao.)

And De la Hoya was the underdog in two of those fights. Against Pacquiao, De la Hoya got old overnight. In boxing this is common. Let me be frank, questioning a man's commitment is borderline insulting. However, boxing fans have a right to be bitter about our favorite fighters especially when they pull a no show.

Hearing the disapproving crowd in San Jose must have struck a nerve for De la Hoya. He knows why they were upset. I believe that the fighter inside of De la Hoya wanted to please them. But the hunger to be a fighter is not there anymore.

The desire to fight may still be with De la Hoya, but the preparation it requires to become a fighter is no longer present.

James Kirkland, the man that knocked out Joel Julio last Saturday is a great example of a fighter that wants it. His seek and destroy style screams "watch me." His commitment to become a champion is clearly evident. And his confidence seems unshakable.

Fight fans are aware De la Hoya had that same fire at one time, or else they would not be upset. The Oscar De la Hoya that charged out of the corner in the 12th round in an attempt to behead Ike Quartey was the last time the Golden Boy's hunger matched his talent.

In my opinion, in order for boxers to make the big bucks, two things are needed to be successful: hunger and talent. Talent is what turns a contender into a world champion. But, when the hunger is gone, talent does not really matter.

Speak to an unknown fighter that desires glory and you will hear the right things. They want to be recognized. You won't just hear them, you will feel them. Then watch them fight.

Studying a hungry fighter that has what it takes to be a champion is like witnessing a starved tiger racing to find a meal. Hungry fighters have ambition. They strive to succeed, to be famous, and to be regarded as the best. But when the lights turn on, and the cash comes in, sometimes things change.

Call it human nature at its finest form. Some of the greatest fighters in the current era have fallen victim to fame. I am sure Oscar De la Hoya's decision to continue fighting would not be as difficult if he was having trouble paying his mortgage.

The 1994 version of Roy Jones that defeated James Toney was much more determined than the 2004 version that lost to Glen Johnson.

The image of a weeping Floyd Mayweather Jr. after his sound beating of Diego Corrales transcended his career. After the fight, there was little talk of "Money May," Lamborghini cars, and most of his other pecuniary indulgences. Mayweather spoke about the next challenge.

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And that is who hardcore boxing fans are searching for, hungry fighters that seek tougher competition.

Granted, De la Hoya, Jones, and Mayweather have been to the mountain top and they are sure fire Hall of Famers.

But at one time, they were like James Kirkland. At one time, they were hungry.

The old saying goes, with more money comes more problems. For fighters, the problem with becoming wealthy is more complicated than paying extra bills every month. Fighters that sleep in silk pajamas have more problems with training, more problems with ambition in the gym, and more problems keeping the ego right-sized.

So do not resent Oscar De la Hoya for quitting on his stool against Manny Pacquiao. Perhaps we should give him a pass for that showing him because he forgot what it is like to be a hungry boxer, a situation that all of us, given the opportunity, might too fall prey.

Slipping The Jab

I could not stop rewinding a YouTube clip of an argument between Rashad Evans and Rampage Jackson during UFC 96. The spat was clearly phony. When Jackson screamed "There is going to be some more "black on black crime," I got flashbacks of watching a WWE Monday Night Raw episode. The only things missing from the stare-down was a steel chair and Jim Ross speaking about Rashad Evans' demonic eyes. I am not saying Evans vs. Jackson is not going to be a great fight. But good god almighty, please give me a break with all of the cheesy buildup.

Questions or Comments Contact Raymond at Raymond.Markarian@yahoo.com