

Battling For The Hearts, And Bucks, Of San Diego Fight Fans

Written by Ralph Gonzalez
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Who said boxing was dying?

Not in my town.

San Diego is by no means small but it's certainly not Los Angeles or New York. So it may come as a surprise that there are currently four boxing promotion companies doing business here. It makes one wonder if "America's Finest City" can sustain all this boxing action. We'll find out soon enough. Tonight there will be two professional boxing shows going at it head to head no more than five miles from each other.

Seems a little crazy right?

The best known and most well established promoter in San Diego, Bobby DePhillippis, will be taking over the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel with the main event being a California State Bantamweight title defense by local kid Chris Martin (13-0, 3 KO's) against Juan Jose "Pinocho" Beltran (18-11, 11 KO's), along with five other bouts on the card. Martin is a huge draw in San Diego. It's a safe assumption that Bobby D's last sell out card had a lot to do with Martin being the headlining act. We must also take into account that DePhillippis' following has been slowly cultivated since the 1980's when he used to put on shows at the El Cortez. To this very day, many of those loyal fans still make sure they show up at all of Bobby D's shows. "I usually have about four to five hundred tickets sold before the show is announced so I'm not worried about the competition," said DePhillippis. "My customers are my customers. If I don't put on fights they don't come. We'll be okay with our audience."

At the Fourth and B in Downtown San Diego, promoter Mark Dion's card will be headlined by heavyweight Damian "Bolo" Wills (23-2, 17 KO's) taking on Stacy Frazier (14-5, 13 KO's). Dion is well known in town as the owner of the very popular "City Boxing" gyms and as a manager to mixed martial artists like former Elite X.C. champion K.J. Noons. The promoting game is a new venture for him. He doesn't feel that having two shows on the same night will have much of an effect on him either. "Bobby D. has a different kind of crowd than I do anyways. If anything it'll test the strength of the boxing community in San Diego," said Dion who's relying on the following he's created through having owned the two "City Boxing" gymnasiums since 2001. He's got an aggressive agenda as far as boxing is concerned. "I'm the newer generation. I believe in guerrilla marketing and being innovative. I've been established for a while in this community and I plan to keep putting on shows every six to eight weeks."

I've covered the boxing scene in this town for close to a decade and I can't remember the last time two professional boxing cards were held on the same night.

But there's more.

On May 21st, a new promotional company, Rogue Boxing Promotions, is slated to throw their

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gloves into the promoter's ring so to speak. They'll be bringing Filipino Mercito Gesta (14-0, 5 KO's) as a main event against Alan Hernandez (14-6, 7 KO's) out of Tijuana which looks like a good Mexico vs. Phillipines scrap. The promotional outfit is the brainchild of former Fight Promoter University alumni, Derek Pierce.

The show is set to take place at the Hard Rock Hotel in the city's downtown area. Pierce attended Roy Englebrecht's promotions seminar and now feels confident enough to be in the mix. "I'm not trying to re-invent the wheel as far as promotions are concerned but we're trying to bring boxing up to date in San Diego," Pierce said. "We want to bring a little bit of Vegas to San Diego. Fans are going to get a breath of fresh air when it comes to boxing. Obviously with the show being at the Hard Rock it brings more of a big time feel to it and I think fans can expect excitement and a lot of fun when May 21st comes around."

The other promoters in town, Sycuan Ringside Promotions, based in San Diego's far east county, put on a boxing show that sold out in September 2008 for Manny Pacquiao Promotions but have yet to announce plans for 2009. The company mostly deals with promoting world class fighters like Israel Vazquez and Joan Guzman.

So who'll win the hearts and souls of San Diego boxing fans? It's going to be a bloody battle. The reality is that San Diego is more of a football and baseball town. Supporting four or even three different promotional companies successfully is unlikely to happen. Surely one or two will eventually fade into the boxing abyss. Meanwhile, as a San Diegan and a member of the media, I'm going to enjoy the melee from the safety and comfort of press row.

May the best promotional company win.