Seldom do these things work out the way they're supposed to but maybe this time it will be different. At least that's what boxing fans should hope for and SHOWTIME executive Ken Hershman is counting on.

Monday at Madison Square Garden Hershman officially announced a long-rumored six-man, round-robin super middleweight tournament to crown one beltless but far more legitimate world champion. It will pit WBA titleholder Mikkel Kessler, WBC champion Carl Froch, top American contenders Andre Ward and Andre Dirrell, IBF middleweight champion Arthur Abraham and ex-middleweight titleholder Jermain Taylor. It is a field of the best super middleweights in the world, the only arguable exclusions being undefeated beltholders Lucien Bute (24-0) and Kaoly Balzsay (21-0). That is unfortunate but if that's the worse thing that can be said about Hershman's efforts everyone should count their blessings.

The most attractive part of the idea, other than the roster of fighters itself, is that it is not a single-elimination event. There will be three preliminary rounds totaling nine fights followed by advancing the top four fighters through a point system into a semi-final double header. Then its winner take all sometime by mid-2011, barring injury or worse.

That winner will not only be the SHOWTIME champion but he'll be one of the few champions in recent years who has won a title the old fashioned way - by beating the other top fighters in the division.

Hopefully, the format will create natural rematches and clear challengers in a sport that seems to have forgotten what that means or how important it is to boxing's legitimacy. But for any of that to work out this tournament has to not end up like most of its predecessors, which almost always seemed to disintegrate when someone got a better offer and decided to pull out or, in the case of the infamous ABC-RING Magazine tournament promoted by Don King, collapsed under the weight of phony ratings, bribes and a Federal investigation into it all.

This tournament seems to have easily avoided the latter by taking four of the top super middleweights in the world and adding Abraham, who may be the best middleweight on the planet but who has been considering moving up for some time. The one dubious selection is Taylor, who though once one of the hottest commodities in the sport has slipped badly under the weight of losing three of his last four fights, two by stoppage.

Still Hershman is to be commended for bringing six top fighters and their five promoters under one tent. It is the kind of thing boxing needs if it is to regain some of the legitimacy it has lost in the past decade or so.

In any sport, people want to know – need to know really – who the champion is. If pro football had two teams claiming to be Super Bowl champion it would not be super. If the American and National League champions refused to play each other and instead opted out to face the Tokyo

Giants and Team Puerto Rico instead there would be a fan revolt.

Only the people running boxing seem to believe that the more champions the better. It may be better for self-deluded sanctioning bodies but it isn't for fans and they're the ones who pay everyone's expenses. Although super middleweight is neither one of the traditional eight weight classes nor a glamour division, what Hershman hopes to have done by June, 2011 is to have turned at least one of these guys into both a household name and a superstar and he may just pull it off if everything goes as planned.

King did something similar but in far less ambitious fashion when he ran his middleweight tournament on HBO eight years ago. The major difference was only four fighters were involved, it was a single loss elimination and King had all of them under contract. He was able to avoid the usual politics of boxing because he had no one to argue with but himself…and of course Bernard Hopkins.

Hershman has accomplished something far more difficult if he can hold this together for the 18 months to two years it will take to complete it. He has six fighters with a combined record of 161-4-1 with 117 knockouts agreeing in advance who they will fight and when without apparent interference from the five promoters who represent them. This is nearly as miraculous as Jesus walking on water.

Handicapping those fights will be difficult and demanding, which is good. They boast different styles and levels of experience but of the six Kessler, the WBA champion, may be the favorite. He is extremely strong and his only loss (41-1, 31 KO) came against Joe Calzaghe, who retired undefeated last year after holding the 168 pound title for a decade so there's no shame in that.

Abraham (30-0, 24 KO) is an extremely sturdy middleweight with both punching power and the ability to take what he has to take to find a way to win. He may prove to be a bit undersized in the end but someone is going to have to work hard to convince him of that.

Froch (25-0, 20 KO) surprised the boxing world when he cold-cocked Taylor (28-3-1, 17 KO) in his last outing, struggling initially with Taylor's athleticism but eventually wearing him down and then taking him out. Froch's strength will make him difficult for any of the others to match while Taylor's propensity for last-minute fades as the pressure mounts would make him a long shot to even make the semi-finals.

As for Ward (19-0, 12 KO) and Dirrell (18-0, 13), youth is on their side but a lack of experience is not. Neither has been tested in the ways the other four have and if everything goes as planned the importance of that will get its first test in October when the fast-moving Dirrell is tentatively scheduled to face Froch in England. Although Dirrell is the superior boxer, Froch, on paper at least, would seem to have the edge where it counts most – in punching power, relentlessness and experience.

Ward is scheduled to face an even sterner test in Kessler on Nov. 7. Kessler is exceedingly strong, steady and some believe the class of the division. What Ward is no one really knows for sure as this will be by far his biggest test.

Yet the fact is he handled dangerous Edison Miranda handily and stopped Jerson Ravelo at a time when some felt Ravelo might test Ward. If anyone in the tournament is underrated it would be the 2004 Olympic gold medalist who has always done things with the kind of quiet efficiency that has left him under appreciated. A win over Kessler would change that perception in a hurry and that is what this entire tournament is designed to do.

It is designed to change the public's perception that boxing has forgotten that true undisputed champions can be crowned in only one place – in the ring.