The mere fact they could all spend a day in one hotel room without bloodshed or a lawsuit being filed was a breakthrough but the clearest evidence that something was different this time came with about 30 minutes left in an all-day summit meeting of nearly all of boxing's regular promoters last week.

Through the door of the Roosevelt Hotel in Manhattan burst Don King himself. As one attendee said, "Five or 10 years ago he would have told us he didn't need any of us. Even King understand things are different today.''

What's different is the business of boxing, which while in ascendancy in many parts of the world is in steep decline in the United States. While major shows continue to gross millions, the lifeblood of the sport, the club shows that are the developmental ground for fighters are struggling and the mid-level promoters are having increasing problems finding ways to showcase young talent.

Eventually, some theorize, this will cause problems for even boxing's biggest promoters because you can't make unknowns cable stars very often.

"This was something long overdue,'' said Lou DiBella, one of the sport's biggest promoters and a former HBO executive. "Until as an industry we realize all our problems can't be fixed individually we're going to struggle.

"It's encouraging that everybody sent someone to be here. Only top Rank (Bob Arum) and Main Events (Kathy Duva) didn't attend and that was only because of (Arturo) Gatti's funeral services. They both signed off on the idea though.

"There's a lot to do and there will be disagreements but everyone agreed pursing the formation of a trade association was enough for one day but if we don't follow up it was all for nothing. I don't expect we're going to go from all acting for ourselves guys to all working together overnight but finally people recognize a problem.''

Five or six years ago, DiBella proposed a similar summit and was laughed at. But the economic landscape has changed so radically in the sport that even the biggest companies – Arum's Top Rank and Oscar De La Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions attended and are likely to return for the next meeting Sept. 14.

"This was the first time every major and small promoter in the country agreed something needs to be done collectively,'' said Art Pelullo. "I really think things are going to change. We have to do things that help the sport grow because we're dying.

"Small promoters needed to be more protected from poaching by big promoters. We need to find ways to buy some things with a group discount, like insurance and rates for hotels and from

airlines.

“One thing we want to talk about is taking fighters into bankruptcy to break a contract. The guy doesn’t owe me anything and I still lose my contract.

“Frankly, I’ve been fortunate. I make a lot of money. I don’t really need this. But the sport does.’’

Dave Itskowitch, Golden Boy’s CEO of boxing, said he came to the room with trepidation, fearing it would turn into 29 promoters attacking their business model, which is the most successful in the sport. Surprisingly, it was not.

“People checked their egos and their grievances at the door,’’ said DeGuardia, who has been the driving force behind the idea ever since he and Pelullo joined forces to co-promote Demetrius Andrade. “It was a good start.’’

Not everyone in the room has the faith of DeGuardia in the collective process but no one was willing to criticize the effort on the record. In fact, one claimed Golden Boy’s presence was, to him, a sign that no one is big enough in boxing any more to go it alone for long.

“Oscar’s not fighting any more,’’ he said. “They’re not making the money they once did. They’re still doing fine but everybody loses money on ESPN and Versus. They see where King and Main Events are now. They we’re at the top once but not any more and they’re smart enough to know they may not be the flavor of the month for ever either. Then what?’’

Whether a collective can significantly alter the landscape for boxing promoters remains to be seen because this has never been a sport where working together is valued. But times are different and for many promoters desperate and so desperate measure are necessary to stop the marginalization of boxing. Yet skepticism remains.

“The main problem is the guys with horses have no horse tracks to run them at,’’ said Mike Acri, a long-time promoter from Erie, Pa. who has been at all levels of the sport but the apex and so brought deep perspective to the room. “It’s a vicious circle because 80 per cent of club shows don’t make any money but they’re necessary.

“Between 1993 and 2003 I ran 117 shows, 36 co-promotions. Now I run three or four a year. If you don’t have horses o you don’t have a track to run you don’t race. I’m old school about this. I don’t think these things usually work.

“I don’t mind if it gets a little vicious. The problem is when you get a few greedy guys who want to take everything. What’s the issue if we can’t get along?

“Look. It’s cool. We’ll be socialists if you want but we’re all scratching for a living. We got to eat first.’’

Although Top Rank was unable to have a representative present because Carl Moretti attended

Gatti's funeral in Montreal that day, Arum signed off on a declaration calling for the formation of a trade association and continued efforts to work collectively for the common good. Yet Top Rank president Todd duBoef needs to see much more before he's sold on the idea of a boxing collective.

"Could it be good for the sport? Yes,'' said duBoef, who has been recruited to become part of the organization's executive committee. "Globally boxing is enormous but here it's star driven. We have to promote the sport not just the individuals.

"Other sports have stars but the sport is what's paramount. Baseball, football, basketball, soccer. Pele is gone but the World Cup is still the World Cup. That's one thing we need to do in boxing.

"We have to do a better PR job too. It is not a dormant sport, as people seem to think in the U.S. In the month of May it was the No. 1 searched item on ESPN.com because we had big events going on.

"Could this be the first step toward controlling some things in boxing under one umbrella? It could but I don't believe the promoters are the problem. The promoter wars of 40 years ago between Arum and King are over. It isn't that way any more. So I want to see more of what they really want to do.''

Long-time Philadelphia promoter J. Russell Peltz continues to run successful shows often without television and has for years partnered with veteran California promoter Don Chargin on shows around the country, attended and admits he "vacillates'' between being for the idea and wondering if it could ever work.

"Don's more optimistic,'' Peltz said. "Just getting everybody in one room was more cooperation than we've had in the past but what happens when individual interests are at odds with the greater good? That's always been where the problem came up.

"So we'll see. Personally I think the biggest problem we have is that promoters don't promote fights any more. They promote fighters and the fan suffers. They don't get good fights. They get one-sided fights for $50 to pad some young guys record and they don't come back.

"We've made fans suffer through some of the worst shows in history. How can you expect to maintain a fan base doing that?''

Chargin, for one, is hopeful a trade association would curb the long-held tradition of poaching, where promoters lure fighters away form one promoter with promises both true and false. He feels if a trade organization can simply find a way to control that it will be a positive step.

"It depends on what kind of teeth we give the organization,'' Peltz said.

In the 1940s and '50s there was a similar organization called the managers' guild, which tried to regulate such rustling of talent. It was successful for a time but eventually was legally toppled

as a restraint of trade. To avoid those problems, the group is looking for an attorney to draw up potential by-laws and may eventually hire a public relations agent whose job would be to work to promote the sport in the way leagues like the NFL, NBA and major league baseball do, rather than simply an individual, the idea being boxing itself has never had its own advocate but in these troubled economic times desperately needs one.

"Let's see how many of the 32 guys who signed put up some money to pay for that,'' one skeptic who wanted to remain anonymous said. "We'll see if they're willing to go into their individual pocket for the common good. That will tell you a lot about how far this goes.''

When the group meets again on Sept. 14 talks will become more specific and as President Obama is learning it is in the details that problems arise. What seemed clear last week in New York however is that all 32 of the promoters who signed the declaration calling for the creation of a trade association for boxing promoters understand one thing – the status quo has to change.

"It tells you something that every promoter in the country was there on their own dime,'' Itskowitch said. "From the smaller promoters, like Aaron Jacobs in Florida and Jimmy Burchfield in New England, to the biggest ones. Can it lead to something? I don't know but the sentiment was there. Everybody has the same problems, just on different scales. People realize something needs to be done. We all sat in a room and didn't rip each others' heads off. There wasn't much ill will in the room. That's a big first step.''

The question is, toward what?