

Sailing The Titanic: 90% Of The Iceberg Is Under Water

Written by Frank Lotierzo

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Let's say you're Joe nobody. All your life you've been a huge boxing fan. Throughout your whole life you have ate, drank and slept amateur and professional boxing. You've studied its history, you have great insight and are very well versed and read on its day to day goings on. Through your years of obsessing over the sport you end up having better insight and knowledge than most, and want to apply it. Sounds like a great thought, but forget about doing it yourself. Although you may have all the knowledge in the world, unless you are one of the good ole boys or are well connected, forget about it.

Let us just assume for the sake of argument that you find some 20 year- old kid who is as obsessed with boxing just as you were, only he has world class talent and ability. And let's say that he is 6'3" and weighs 230 pounds. He also happens to have the speed and reflexes of Ali, the chin of Jeffries, the two handed power of Foreman, the left hook of Frazier, the right hand of Shavers, the jab of Liston, the stamina of Marciano, the heart of Holyfield, throws combinations like Louis, and can adapt to all styles like Holmes? Sounds like the makings of a future heavyweight champion in any era too me. As a popular college football analyst often says, "not so fast".

You would think with a fighter that dynamic that you could just work and fight your way to the title. With a fighter that good you would automatically assume that you wouldn't need any favors from anyone, and he could just beat all the contenders ahead of him until he is the only one left to challenge the champ? Again, not so fast!

Do you realize that there is no such thing as a true free agent in professional boxing? Just about all the top fighters have signed a portion of themselves over to one of boxing's major power brokers. The closest thing boxing has had to true free-agents recently were Sugar Ray Leonard and Oscar De La Hoya. And that's for two reasons. One is that they were both Olympic gold medal winners and had established a following and fan base. The second reason is both Sugar Ray Leonard and Oscar De La Hoya had crossover appeal. That translated into them bringing non boxing fans over to boxing.

Fighters like Leonard and De La Hoya brought such a huge fan base and created such a draw that most promoters and networks will work with them most of the time. This is because they know the money that can be made by being associated with them, even if it's just once. Remember, they drew non sports and boxing fans, men and women, black, white, and Hispanics to their fights. Nothing gives an athlete or fighter power like having crossover appeal does.

That said, Leonard and De La Hoya were the rare exceptions. In the real world it works completely different for most fighters than it did for Leonard and De La Hoya. They were basically able to write their own ticket!

Most fans have probably said to themselves that if they ever discovered a young Joe Louis

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they would never sell any part of him to anyone. They assume if you just fight and beat all the top fighters and contenders your fighter will have to get a title shot? What most don't know is that unless you give up some part of your fighter, he'll never be seen by anyone and he will never fight on television.

Without him being seen on TV, who's going to know about him? Nobody! If he can't be seen by the public his ability doesn't mean squat. It's like NASA giving you one of the spaces shuttles. What good is it if you don't have the means or knowledge to fly it? The same thing applies to boxing an overwhelming majority of the time. Without giving options to one of the major promoters or networks, your fighter will be as obsolete as having a space shuttle in your back yard!

Suppose you have that perfect heavyweight as mentioned above. Do you realize if you managed him and tried to match him yourself that you would have to pay both him and his opponents if you didn't sign with a promoter? It's not just the big promoters who demand options, it's the smaller promoters as well. The ones that you've never even heard of also demand you sign an options agreement for either x-number of fights or years. Basically these guys demand a piece of your fighter even though they had nothing to do with finding him or developing him.

This is why there are so many mismatches in boxing today at the 4-8 round level. Any manager who has to pay his fighter and his opponent is certainly not going to be the one who gets his fighter knocked off. That's not saying that the fights are set-ups, it's just the way business is done when a fighter and his manager are not aligned with a major promoter and network. Trying to get fights for the fighter who is not connected is a living nightmare, regardless of how good he may be. There is somebody out there who wants a piece of him all the way up the line, and some promoter who is trying like hell to get him knocked off.

The fact of the matter is, it doesn't make a difference how good your fighter is or will be. You'll never get him ranked or on TV unless you sign a significant piece of him away. There is no way around it whatsoever. Today boxing is totally controlled by promoters and television networks. Unfortunately there is nothing you can do to get around it. If you don't sign with a promoter, you don't fight. If you or your promoter have no alignment with a network, nobody will ever see your great heavyweight prospect fight.

If you don't want to sign a promotional deal for your fighter--and of course eventually you'll have no choice--you can expect to spend about a half million dollars of your own money getting him enough fights so he has a chance to get noticed. At that point he needs more than a million dollar payday just to recoup your expenses. He can't get that without a title shot or an HBO fight, and he can't get either of those without making a promotional deal. Talk about a Catch 22. Plus, if he manages to get one of those fights without a promotional deal, it'll be as an opponent, not as the protected, and he'll be thrown in with killers.

Managing and training a top fighter is a dream of many. However, finding that talented prospect is definitely not easy, but it is the only part that you actually have control over. So, it's either sign him over to a promoter and network, or he most likely goes nowhere. If you don't sign him away,

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you may as well have him go to the corner bar and have him beat up the bouncer there and hope it makes the eleven o'clock news! Without any alignment with the powers that control boxing, that's the only way he'll get any exposure or publicity.

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