LAS VEGAS -- Bob Arum, the promoter of tomorrow's Miguel Cotto-Manny Pacquiao extravaganza, is using the event's undercard to drive revenue, but not in the conventional way. While potentially exciting preliminary fights can influence boxing fans to purchase a $54.95 pay-per-view show, Arum contends that a card featuring intriguing personalities can attract an audience beyond the realm of hardcore supporters.

At a press conference on Thursday, Arum spent most time hyping the two stars of the undercard, Yuri Foreman and Julio Cesar Chavez  Jr. Foreman has been given the chance to win a 154-pound world title when he challenges Daniel Santos for the WBA belt on Saturday, while Chavez Jr. will meet the obscure Troy Rowland in the event's chief support bout.

The opportunities afforded to Foreman and Chavez Jr. have largely drawn scorn from boxing insiders.

"The undercard rots," reckons Dan Rafael of ESPN.com. "Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. against Troy Rowland and the potentially horrific Daniel Santos-Yuri Foreman junior middleweight title bout do not a stellar undercard make."

Hardcore boxing followers may condemn contests that figure to be one-sided or lack excitement, but appealing storylines can pique interest from a mainstream audience.

If Foreman, an unbeaten fighter with an awkward defensive style, can defeat Santos he will become the first Israeli citizen to win a world title, while his orthodox Jewish faith and desire to become a rabbi has led to profiles in the New York Times.

"I never in my wildest dreams when I started promoting Muhammad Ali would have believed I would be putting on a card that featured a future rabbi. That was beyond all imagination," said Arum on Thursday.

Similarly, Chavez Jr.'s background has aided his career, helping him develop into a popular attraction among Mexican fans. The fighter, a son of the celebrated Julio Cesar Chavez, has largely been untested in his unbeaten 41-fight career, but has drawn a new audience to boxing south of the boarder.

"For ten years there wasn't a fight shown on terrestrial television [in Mexico]," stressed Arum. "All fights were on premium television. The conventional wisdom was that there was no market [for boxing] and the sponsors weren't interested. We started putting [Chavez Jr.'s] fights on terrestrial television and [the broadcasts] became the number one rated show of the week."

"[Saturday's] promotion will demonstrate to the sponsors, to the networks, to everyone that

boxing is a hot sport in the US," continued Arum. "If [boxing is] presented right the sponsors will come back in tremendous fashion."

But devoting such high-billing to the likes of Foreman and Chavez Jr. won't prove lucrative if the fighters transpire to be fleeting novelty acts.

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Arum upholds that Saturday's undercard doesn't totally neglect hardcore fans. The welterweight showdown between Jesus Soto Karass and Alfonso Gomez is likely to be a grueling struggle between two hardnosed but limited prizefighters.

"Anybody who has watched boxing for the last two or three years knows these guys come to fight," said Arum. "Whenever I discuss cards with [Top Rank matchmakers] Bruce Trampler and Brad Goodman, and I say I need an action fight on this card, the first name they come up with is Soto Karass."

But both Soto Karass and Gomez have been exposed at the higher-levels of the sport and the fight figures to be a bloody ordeal for both men with little long-term consequence for their standings, if not their health.

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While the depth of Saturday's undercard is relatively shallow, at least Arum will be giving television exposure to all fighters on the show. Bouts that are not on the pay-per-view portion of the card will be screened free of charge on cable systems for 90 minutes, starting at 4pm PST. The fights will then be followed by a 30 minute documentary hyping Cotto-Pacquiao.

The endeavor will provide highly-touted prospects such as Matt Korobov and Rodrigo Garcia with a platform to demonstrate their skills, while also acting as a vehicle to squeeze out some last-minute pay-per-view sales.

"We hope that [viewers] will be so incentivized [by the fights and documentary] that those who haven't yet bought the pay-per-view will buy it," said Arum.

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Arum also revealed that extra measures have been taken to increase the production values of the Cotto-Pacquiao event.

"We have quite a ceremony planned for the weigh-in on Friday," he said. "And wait 'til you see the [MGM Grand Garden] Arena on Saturday.  We have big things planned."

Arum also hinted that the Ultimate Fighting Championship MMA shows have influenced his new production efforts.

“They [UFC] have led the way when it comes to presentation,” admitted the 78-year-old promoter.

But his admiration for the UFC doesn’t extend to action inside the cage.

“I don’t watch that crap,” he spurted.
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