

Is This The Start Of A New Era Of Packed PPV Undercards? We Can Hope

Written by Michael Woods

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Maybe my number one pet peeve regarding the fight game is the garbage pay per view undercards fans are offered. This trend has increased in recent years, as promoters have gone cheap with their undercards, typically loading them up with their prospects in resume-builders. This practice has resulted in fight fans being conditioned to be psyched up only for the main event. They can drink brew, chat with pals, and leave the sound off til 11:15, as opposed to folks who spend dough on a UFC undercard, knowing that theyll see a bunch of hotly contested scraps.

Heres hoping that promoters have been listening to our rants, and those from fans who consistently beef that the undercards are ultra weak. I know that during the recent session with some BWAA members and the Boxing Promoters Association in NYC, I wailed loudly about the crap undercards, and was assured that this complaint would be shared with the promoters who were not present. That group included Golden Boy Promotions, which is putting on a card on July 31 at Mandalay Bay, which is topped by Juan Manuel Marquez-Juan Diaz II. Interestingly, Richard Schaefer and Oscar De La Hoya seem to have read the minutes from that meeting, and have responded. Theyre presenting the undercard to that July 31st card as a return, of sorts, to the days when Don King loaded up his cards with top to bottom juicy tussles.

I take my share of the blame for that, said Richard Schaefer on a Wednesday conference call, while he pointed out that inter-promotional PPVs limited the ability to make compelling matches. You cant get any more explosive than this undercard we have here. With Marquez and Diaz, we knew we had the Fight of the Year again; now we have the Night of the Year. Its the best undercard weve had on any card top to bottom. I think fight fans deserve that. Here we are rolling the dice, we are taking a big financial risk.

We have several interesting fights where both fighters know they have to win or their careers might end, said Golden Boy chief Oscar De La Hoya, back in the mix after six months of being low profile. Each of these fights could headline on HBO, or Showtime. Were not fooling anyone here, these are not fights where we know who is going to win.

Rocky Juarez (28-6-1), who takes on 28-1 Jorge Linares in a super featherweight scrap, certainly fits the description ODLH speaks of. Hes 3-5-1 in his last nine, and has consistently come up short in step up fights, so some critics point to his presence as a bit of a blot on the loaded undercard. Some would prefer a fresh face instead of Juarez, who is trying out the water at 135, but De La Hoya insisted that there will be drama in evidence as we see if Juarez can get over the hump: He keeps on falling short but he keeps on coming back.

Another undercard fighter with much on the line is 38-year-old Joel Casamayor (37-4-1), who goes in tough against 26-1-1 Californian Robert Guerrero in a junior welter tangle. He hasnt been very busy recently, as his last scrap came against 11-3 Jason Davis last November, and it is quite possible hes at or near the end of the road.

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Schaefer touched on a possible Manny Pacquiao-Juan Manuel Marquez redo. He said he doesn't think Manny, or promoter Bob Arum, wants to tangle with Marquez again, now or ever, because he has Pacquiao's number.

All in all, fight fans can be a cynical lot. Like many consumers, many haven't been happy with rising costs, in the face of wage diminishment versus inflation, in recent years. So while they are happy to hear Golden Boy talk a solid game--Schaefer said they'll spend almost \$4 million on the whole promotion--and acknowledge that the crap undercards are indeed a problem, and hurt the boxing brand, they want to see how it plays out. We shall see on July 31. If Juarez can get over the hump, if Casamayor can turn back the clock, if Jacobs and Pirog live up to Oscars' scouting report, then we'll all be happy, content that the game is moving, at least in this area, in the right direction. Schaefer did throw out a word of warning: if fans don't signal their happiness by ponying up for this event, he will not be as inclined to break open the bank to load up the undercard in the future.

SPEEDBAG Danny Jacobs (20-0), who takes on 16-0 Dmitry Pirog for the vacant WBO 160 pound title, would probably have liked to be on the call to correct De La Hoya, who said he was from the Bronx. Jacobs is out of Brooklyn, Brownsville to be exact. This one has fight of the year written all over it, he said.

--The six spotlight undercard fighters have a record of 153 wins, 12 losses, 3 draws and 108 knockouts, and have won nine world titles between them.