

If Ross Is Chill, We Could Still Get Our Fill

Written by Michael Woods
Monday, 26 July 2010 19:00

You must hand it to HBO boss Ross Greenburg.

What an even tempered man.

After being accused on July 19, practically, by Floyd Mayweather advisor Leonard Ellerbe of being complicit in a phony, in Ellerbes eyes, round of negotiations for a Mayweather-Pacquiao fight, the HBO head honcho held his tongue. One could surmise that he might have liked to put Ellerbe on blast, and set the record as he sees it straight.

But, no.

It looks like he did the wise thing, and didnt dive into the gutter of personal attacks, and counterattacks. He recognized that business is business, and personal is personal, and with so many volatile personalities and immense egos in the mix, it would be wiser to refrain from adding accelerant to the fire.

Ellerbe, youll recall, sent out a statement which read, "Here are the facts. Al Haymon, Richard Schaefer and myself speak to each other on a regular basis and the truth is no negotiations have ever taken place nor was there ever a deal agreed upon by Team Mayweather or Floyd Mayweather to fight Manny Pacquiao on November 13. Either Ross Greenburg or Bob Arum is not telling the truth, but history tells us who is lying.

Youll recall that Pacquiao promoter Bob Arum, on a July 16 conference call, had said, About two months ago, just after the Mayweather-Mosley fight, I got a call from Ross Greenburg, the president of HBO Sports, who asked me frankly whether myself and Manny Pacquiao wanted to do the fight against Floyd Mayweather and I assured him after talking to Manny that was the case. From there I have had a couple of conversations with Ross and I laid out all the terms that would be acceptable to our side and I also informed him about the concession that Manny had made about drug testing. He got back to me in a couple of weeks and told me he had discussions with Al Haymon, representing Mayweather, and that everything looked good. We were nearing a resolution. The subsequent conversations with Ross detailed to me discussions he had with Al Haymon. Nowhere were the names of Richard Schaefer or Golden Boy mentioned although I read, as you all did, Oscar's statement that a deal was close, so I assume from that, that Haymon was keeping Golden Boy abreast of the situation.

So Ellerbe took umbrage at Arums description of negotiations, such as they were, and went public with his dismay. And we waited for an Arum overhand right. And what we got was a stiff one-two, of sorts.

A few hours after Ellerbe took aim and pulled the trigger on the truth issue, Arum told Lem Satterfield of Fanhouse, This is Alice In Wonderland Time. This is preposterous. Its almost like dealing with people who have lost their minds. Its totally bizarre. I mean, how do you answer to

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something like that? Richard Schaefer has said for seven weeks that there was a gag order in place when he was asked about the negotiations. If there are no negotiations, then why or how is there a gag order and where did it come from? All that I know is what Ross has told me. I havent talked to anyone else. Of course Ross is not lying. Are you crazy? I talked to him today. What Ross told me is that he said, take it easy. He said, dont go crazy. Take it easy, and were still trying to make the fight. Thats what he said to me, word, for word. I guess that he thought like I would go off at this kind of stupid thing.

The even keeled Greenburg, who seemingly holds out hope that this megafight isnt DOA, that life can be breathed into the proposed scrap, finally weighed in, putting half his big toe in the water, a week after that.

Fights like Mayweather vs. Pacquiao are significant because of these fighters ability to connect with sports fans around the world, he said, in a statement released to select media outlets. Its unfortunate that it wont happen in 2010. I had been negotiating with a representative from each side since May 2, carefully trying to put the fight together. Hopefully, someday this fight will happen. Sports fans deserve it.

As far as rejoinders go, this was the mildest sort. Greenburg took exception to Ellerbes characterization of the second round of negotiations, or non-negotiations, or whatever term he thinks actually fits the talking that went on. (We can agree that some talking went on, cant we?) But he refrained from mentioning Ellerbe by name, and therefore didnt cause an escalation of enmity.

Some of you will remember that Greenburg showed a similar cool when Floyd himself gave HBO, or a portion of their squad, a tongue lashing in July 2008, as he was going on hiatus. A guy like Jim Lampley, he praises Kelly Pavlik -- who has won some good fights, he beat Jermain Taylor twice, we have to give him credit for that -- but they talk about Kelly Pavlik, a white fighter, like hes the second coming, he told the Grand Rapids Press. Or they go crazy over Manny Pacquiao. But Im a black fighter. Is it racial? Absolutely. They praise white fighters, they praise Hispanic fighters, whatever. But black fighters, they never praise. Ive noticed it for a long time but I couldnt say anything because I had to do business with them. Ill still do business with them, but Im done holding my tongue. I think HBO is great. But their announcers are full of s--t.

Greenburg held his tongue after that broadside, and then after a couple days, said: Floyd is a tremendous athlete who gave his all to the sport. We have nothing but admiration for what he accomplished in the ring. His remarks regarding HBO broadcasters and executives are unfortunate and we could not disagree more. At the time, I took him to task, for not immediately coming to the defense of his crew, and being more forceful with his response, for beginning his statement as if he were offering the guy a send-off toast. But Greenburg gets it, that this is business, and that Floyd and his team will spout off, and speak in the heat of the moment. Greenburg understands that his corporate responsibility is his ultimate concern, that he could wade into the fray, on principle, but that could make the situation worse, and result in a loss of principal for his superiors. And maybe result in a lack of job stability.

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Not knowing the man personally, I cant say how difficult it is for him to refrain from answering. For me, were I in his shoes, the gloves would be off, and the counters would fly, and quite likely, the rift would become irreparable.

Fight fans should be thankful that Greenburg isnt me. If and when he starts a serve and volley match with Ellerbe, or Mayweather, or anyone involved in the proposed superfight, with insults going back and forth, then those of us hoping for a Mayweather-Pacquiao bout are in trouble. Because that to me would signal that the rift is immense, that the one guy who seems to be able to hold off on letting the personal bleed into business, no longer feels it necessary to maintain his composure.

Bottom line, people: I think theres still hope for Manny-Money to be made. As long as Ross is chill, we may well get our fill. It may not be until 2012, but....