

When Golden Boy Promotions decided to showcase Floyd Mayweather, Jr.'s return to the ring last year in movie theaters around the United States, the idea certainly had novelty going for it: It was the first time boxing had graced the silver screen widely dating back to 1980.

Since Golden Boy began its partnership with movie theater teammate NCM Fathom that September, the novelty has worn off, but the idea is apparently here to stay. The latest sojourn is Saturday night's rematch between lightweight champion Juan Manuel Marquez and Juan Diaz, the fourth event the two companies have done together.

It turns out there's some meaningful demand for paying as little as \$15 per ticket with fellow hardcore boxing fans to watch 40-foot-tall pugilists in digital projection – or even to watch the fights with new young fans and old fans who remember the days of closed circuit boxing in movie theaters, when Sugar Ray Leonard and Muhammad Ali were household names.

“It allows them to really reconnect with boxing at a very grassroots level across the country in a way they really can't do except from ringside, Dan Diamond, vice president at Fathom, said in an interview Thursday. Fathom can digitally broadcasts events to more than 500 theaters.

Diamond said that company policy forbids him from discussing precise ticket sales. That obviously makes it hard to estimate exactly how well the shows have done. Instead, there are only hints.

Ultimately, though, if boxing wasn't successful in the theaters then probably neither Fathom nor Golden Boy would keep doing it (although for their part, boxing promoters have been known from time to time to shoot themselves repeatedly in the foot, by, say, twice finding a way to drop the ball on Mayweather-Manny Pacquiao).

“At end of day, the numbers have been real strong overall, Diamond said. “It's met our expectations.

For individual cards, the showing have turned up “tens of thousands of fans in as many as 400-plus theaters across the country, he said. Some venues have even sold out.

For Mayweather-Juan Manuel Marquez, 170 theaters that carried the fight were filled to 80% capacity, Golden Boy CEO Richard Schaefer claimed last year.

“Clearly, certain fight cards are going to have more interest than others, said Diamond. To date, Fathom has carried two Mayweather fights, against Marquez and Shane Mosley, and the not-anticipated rematch between Bernard Hopkins and Roy Jones. “Mayweather fights have done bigger numbers than Hopkins-Jones did.

And the number of fans for boxing nights can vary depending on movie season. Square in the

TIM STARKS SPECIAL TO TSS: Boxing-Theater Marriage Working So Far

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middle of blockbuster, popcorn flick territory, when theaters commit a certain number of screens to the biggest movies, theaters don't have as much space for boxing, as is the case for Marquez-Diaz II. Mayweather-Mosley was showcased in more than 415 theaters; Marquez-Diaz II will be in more than 270.

Fathom has found sports – not just boxing, but mixed martial arts and soccer – to be a nice ticket seller. It sold 1.8 million tickets nationwide last year for everything from the brutal ballet of boxing to the actual opera. In its 2009 annual report, the company credited its expansion into live sports for helping increasing ticket revenue by 42 percent compared to 2008.

The company's big idea, Diamond said, is to revive the notion of movie theaters as community centers.

When Fathom began hosting boxing, it prompted questions about how it would affect pay-per-view sales. But Diamond said the theaters have drawn in a new audience – in part because Fathom distributes advertising via thousands of screens that air advertising in advance. "We're really extending the brand of boxing who may not be as connected to it with advertising right before a movie, he said.

While most boxing forum denizens that report back on their experience at the cinema have raved, some have complained about being deprived of their trusty friend beer. Boxing crowds, after all, aren't shy about alcohol consumption. But Diamond said the absence of drinking can be a plus for theaters.

"I have 15-year-old son I can't take to sports bar, Diamond said. "He's too young to participate in drinking and watching a fight. I don't want him to be in that situation. It doesn't make one better or worse, but for some segments of the audience, this is the environment they want.

For now, Fathom is happy partnering with Golden Boy alone, as opposed to other promoters. And Diamond said that's the direction it's going for the foreseeable future.

But boxing overall remains in Fathoms plans.

"It's been really exciting, he said. "We're in this to play long ball.

EDITOR NOTE: Starks is the creator of the superlative queensberry-rules.com/. Put the blog on your bookmarks list. He tells it like it is, in a thoughtful, principled, concise manner. Sometimes he even aims the cannon at TSS, but we still are fans!