

No Kessler May Be No Problem For Showtime

Written by George Kimball
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Tuesday morning Showtime had two super-middleweight title fights on the books for the evening of Sept 25. Now looks as though there won't be any. Leaving aside for a moment the question of whether the Reluctant Andres will ever get around to fighting each other – they probably will, now, but not on Sept. 25th – the more overriding matter in the minds of most boxing fans right now seems to be: Who's going to replace Mikkel Kessler in the Super Six tournament.

Here's your answer: Nobody.

While the career-threatening injury to the Danish boxer is being viewed elsewhere as a potentially crippling blow to Showtime's World Boxing Classic, Ken Hershman may not be looking at it that way at all.

Rather, Showtime has been presented with what may be a blessing in disguise – the opportunity for a mid-course correction that can both re-energize the tournament and provide a powerful incentive for former Olympic teammates Andre Ward and Andre Dirrell to put aside their friendship, put on the gloves, and fight it out for twelve rounds – something that up until now neither has seemed particularly anxious to do.

From the very outset Showtime was warned that by investing in a six-man, round-robin format they had predicated their tournament on a house of cards in which many things could go wrong – and most of them did. As of this morning, the super-middleweights haven't even competed their first round, and the exercise has already ended the careers of two of the original six participants.

What would seem in order now is a do-over, and the stars are ideally aligned for that to happen.

The point of the first round was to separate the wheat from the chaff. Mission accomplished. The five remaining 168 pounders have already separated themselves into two distinct groups, one consisting of Ward, Dirrell, Arthur Abraham, and Carl Froch; the other consists of Allan Green.

If a replacement were secured for Kessler at this point, what would be the point of it? He'd wind up fighting Green. Who wants to see that?

What you'll see instead is that the two scheduled bouts will remain as they are, but instead of a mop-up exercise concluding the first round, they will now constitute the semifinals of a four-man tournament.

This, obviously, will require some accommodation on Showtime's part, if not out of fairness to Green, then out of fairness to Lou DiBella, who has now been victimized twice – first by his act of conscience in pulling a damaged Jermain Taylor out of the original lineup, and now by the

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injury that has robbed Green of a payday. But paying DiBella a tidy sum – say, the quarter of a million or so he would have received had Kessler-Green proceeded on schedule – for consenting to abrogate an agreement signed by all the promoters back when this thing started – should be a small consideration in light of the momentum to be gained by repositioning the Super Six to achieve maximum drama.

The Oct. 2 Abraham-Froch bout that just a few days ago seemed an afterthought to the process would not only produce a finalist to oppose the Ward-Dirrell winner, the Monte Carlo bout will now almost certainly produce a new WBC champion as well. (At the time of Kessler's abdication, Abraham and Froch were 2-3 in that sanctioning body's ratings. Dirrell, No. 1, was clearly unavailable.)

Ward and Dirrell, obviously, would prefer to defer their meeting, but it's hard to see how that could be accomplished. Re-seeding wouldn't help; going by the present point-standings, incorporating Showtime's tie-breaking procedure, Ward would be the top seed, Dirrell the fourth.

But the knowledge that the winner will be one fight away from walking away with the whole thing may be a more persuasive argument than whatever Gary Shaw and Dan Goossen have been whispering in their fighters' ears up until now.

There is yet one more compelling reason for fast-forwarding the process: it offers a chance to recapture some of the stolen thunder that has accrued to a guy many believe should never have been excluded from this process to begin with, and who has hovered over it from the outset. Abraham and Froch fight in less than a month. If Ward and Green can be hustled into the gym, a site announced, and tickets put on sale, there's every chance of getting that one on the books for late October.

IBF champion Lucian Bute, who for the past year has been the pink elephant in the room, makes a mandatory defense against Jesse Brinkley Oct. 14 in Montreal. Showtime, if it plays its cards right, could have its final pairing announced before anybody even notices.