

Ward Reiterates: I Wanted To Fight Dirrell

Written by Raymond Markarian
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There has been plenty of speculation about the reasoning for Andre Dirrell's absence in the Super Six Boxing Classic.

Last week, Dirrell officially pulled out of the tournament because of a reoccurring neurological injury. It was said that Dirrell has had blurred vision and the symptoms are not going away and that the injury was caused at the end of Dirrell's last fight when he was fouled by Arthur Abraham.

Many boxing fans and members of the media believe that Dirrell and his Olympic teammate Andre Ward never desired to fight one another because of their apparent very close friendship. But Andre Ward says that all is not true.

Ward told TSS, "I am just ready to fight. I have been ready to fight. You know that. But if a man says that he has a head injury then you have to take him at his word. But people are always going to say what they are going to say. I can't control that.

The moment Andre Dirrell officially pulled out of the Super Six Boxing Tournament rumors began to swirl about the fighters. There have been constant reports that Ward and Dirrell were not training because they refused to fight each other.

However, Ward has been training for quite some time. (I have seen it with my own eyes.) The Super Middleweight champion has been in the gym at least three days a week for at least the past month or so. Ward has been "sharpening the sword as he likes to call it, in preparation for the ultimate date that he has to get in the ring, which just so happens to fall on November 27th against Sakio Bika, Dirrell's replacement.

The Oakland native said that he is "preparing for war, it does not matter who is across that ring.

Ward said that he never spoke with Dirrell during this entire ordeal. The reality of the topic of Ward and Dirrell's relationship is that they are friends but not the closest buddies. They were in the same boxing tournaments as amateur fighters but never fought each other in the ring. As a matter of fact, Virgil Hunter, and Leon "Bumper Lawson, the respective trainers of both combatants, are closer friends than Ward and Dirrell.

Hunter and Lawson used to spend time together at amateur tournaments and built their relationship on a common bond. They are two men that have the same mentoring relationship to their fighters. But as teenagers, Ward and Dirrell grew up separately in different parts of the country. Ward was in California and Dirrell was in Michigan. And the mutual relationship grew between both camps at the professional level.

When the Super Six was announced, Ward and Dirrell were scheduled to fight in round three of

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the tournament. Immediately after Ward's last fight against Allan Green, Ward's promoter Dan Goossen, reiterated to me that Andre Ward has a contract in place to fight the first three rounds of the Super Six Tournament at home in Oakland.

Obviously there were some objections from the camps of other the fighters in the Super Six including Andre Dirrell's. The original date for the Ward/Dirrell bout was September 25th, which happened to be a quick turnaround for Ward who fought his last fight three months prior. There was a venue dispute when negotiations for the fight began to take place. Dirrell's camp refused to fight in Oakland and Ward refused to travel to Dirrell's hometown of Detroit. A neutral venue was being discussed. No matter

how either Ward or Dirrell felt about the fight, the venue dispute created a stalemate and the date of September 25th blew away.

But a neutral site for the fight was still being discussed. A few weeks ago, Ward told me that the Hard Rock in Las Vegas was one of those potential locations. However, there was no discussion of Dirrell's head injury at the time.

The timing of Dirrell's withdrawal from the Super Six only reiterates the doubt that public had in Ward and Dirrell ever wanting to square off.

Ward made it clear that the fight did not happen on September 25th because of a venue dispute not because they were trying to dupe the public and talk their way out of it. He also reminded me that all of this talk about the two rising stars not wanting to fight each other because of their "great friendship is nonsense. "It is the nature of the business. People are going to say what they say. But they don't have all of the facts. I did not even have all of the facts. I was ready to go on the road. I think it is a good thing for me. It is good to change things up.

There was a report by Steve Kim of Maxboxing.com that compared Ward and Dirrell's relationship to Evander Holyfield's friendship with his fellow 1984 Olympic teammate Henry Tillman. It was stated that Holyfield stood in Tillman's wedding a few weeks after they fought one another, a fight in which Holyfield won decisively. Kim also questioned the fortitude of both Ward and Dirrell in the piece, stating that Ward and Dirrell lack the "violence and intensity of fighters in previous eras.

But the comparison of Holyfield and Tillman with Ward and Dirrell was somewhat glorified. It would be doubtful if Ward and Dirrell would ever stand in each other's wedding. (For the record, both are married, and didnt attend the others nuptials). These guys hardly talk on the phone.

It must be remembered that all combatants in the Super Six have a contractually obligation with Showtime to complete the tournament. If they are in breach then Showtime could sue them personally.

We as fight fans have a bad habit of calling out fighters in situations like this, of questioning their heart or level of commitment. But when the promoters don't have the facts straight, and the fighters don't have the facts straight, it gives us little substance to continue speculating and

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spreading rumors.