It isn't an absolute necessity, but has there ever been a truly great fighter who didn't have a catchy nickname? Boxing is the last preserve of the nom de guerre, a throwback preserve where guys known as "Hands of Stone, the "Manassas Mauler, "Brown Bomber, "Brockton Blockbuster and "Old Mongoose are as easily identifiable by their secondary handles as they are for their official listings on birth certificates. Maybe even more so; Sugar Ray Robinson came into this world as Walker Smith, Rocky Marciano as Rocco Marchegiano, Willie Pep as Guglielmo Papaleo.

Perhaps his misfortune of being branded with a common name, one that fails to stand out from the crowd, has contributed to welterweight contender Mike Jones' struggle to gain mainstream acceptance to date. To counteract that, Jones' handlers conducted a contest last year whereby fans could enter suggestions for an official nickname, the winning entry to be picked by Jones himself.

Alas, Jones chose the "Messiah, which struck some as blasphemous and was quickly replaced by "M.J., which might have been considered a marginal upgrade were it not for the fact that those initials previously referred to basketball legend Michael Jordan and the late Michael Jackson. Say "M.J. to the average man on the street and he'll likely formulate a mental image of double-clutch dunks or moonwalking dance steps.

Among the failed candidates is my personal favorite, "Breakin' Bones Jones, which at least rhymes. But with the stroke of a pen, the 27-year-old Jones has taken perhaps his biggest stride yet toward becoming the type of household familiarity that precludes the need for an artificially spiffied image.

The Bard himself, William Shakespeare, wrote that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. Jones (22-0, 18 KOs) gets his long-awaited opportunity to demonstrate that when he defends his fringe NABO and NABA championships against Jesus Soto-Karass (24-4-3, 16 KOs) on Nov. 13, in one of the televised undercard bouts of a pay-per-view card topped by the Manny Pacquiao-Antonio Margarito main event at the $1.2 billion Cowboys Stadium.

It marks the first appearance for Jones under the auspices of Top Rank Inc., which will co-promote him along with Philadelphia-based J Russell Peltz and Joe Hand Sr.

"We really like Jones, Arum said. "We think he's a real talent. He represents the future of the welterweight division.

"And he has a fan base. He can sell tickets. But let's face it, this fight is very important to him. The card is going to have a huge pay-per-view audience, a huge live audience. If he comes through and looks good, I know Showtime and HBO will be lining up to use him in the first quarter of next year.

Considering that Arum has a penchant for pairing fighters he controls – Pacquiao's last ring appearance was against Joshua Clottey, a Top Rank property, as is Margarito – the best-case scenario for Jones would be for him to become a viable enough attraction to someday share the ring with the Filipino sensation, who arguably is the biggest draw in boxing.

"That I can't say, Arum said when asked if a Pacquiao-Jones matchup eventually could come to fruition. "It would depend on so many factors.

But for Jones, who has augmented his boxing income by working part-time at the Home Depot in Cherry Hill, N.J., the chance to shine on the big stage of Cowboys Stadium already is a dream come true.

"I'm excited about seen by a whole lot of people, more people than have ever seen me fight before, said Jones, who is rated No. 2 by the WBA and WBO, No. 4 by the WBC and No. 6 by the IBF. "All the hard work I've put in, day in and day out, is starting to pay off.

"I'm a patient person. I truly believe I'm meant to be the best. I can wait a little while longer for that to happen. I always say that my time will come, and when it does, I'm going to shine and shine bright. I know I'm going to put on a hell of a show in Cowboys Stadium.

Jones' path toward the top of his profession hasn't exactly been via the express route. Like another Philadelphia fighter who painstakingly became an international icon, Bernard "The Executioner Hopkins, Jones rose in small increments, becoming something of a local legend in hardscrabble punching pits like the Blue Horizon, where he fought once, and the New Alhambra, where he logged 11 appearances.

As Arum noted, Jones is a draw, but only at a modest level. Selling out a 1,500-seat venue for non-televised bouts is one thing, becoming a PPV attraction on a national and global scale is quite another. Bridging that considerable divide is a leap that many local sensations endeavor to undertake, only to come up short.

But Jones, as is the case with another Philly prospect with impressive credentials, junior welterweight prospect Danny "Swift Garcia, conceivably has the stuff to eventually succeed Hopkins as the face of Philadelphia boxing. Jones is a lean boxer-puncher whose style has been likened by some to that of a young Thomas Hearns, a comparison any fighter with visions of grandeur would gladly welcome.

"If Mike Jones is the fighter we think he is, there'll be enough money for everybody, Peltz said of his alliance he and other members of Team Jones formed with Arum, who used Jones on two Atlantic City shows co-promoted by Top Rank earlier this year, in which the prospective next-big-thing in the welterweight division outpointed veteran Henry Bruseles and stopped Hector Munoz in five rounds.

In addition to Peltz and Hand, Jones' longtime support crew consists of co-managers Doc Nowicki and Jim Williams and trainer Vaughn Jackson. They believed in him when others, more skeptical, did not share their vision of what could be.

“It’s not just that he can be my next world champion, Peltz said before Jones starched Dario Esalas in two rounds on March 6, 2009, at the Blue Horizon. “He has a chance to be a megastar. I’m looking for this kid to get it all.

Arum must think so, too, and his involvement should speed up the process through which Jones will either be certified as the real deal, or exposed as just another wannabe. It will be interesting to see how things shake out for the father of two whose focus in training and quiet, reserved manner out of the ring should be regarded as positives.

“Mike Jones is very quiet, Nowicki said. “He doesn’t curse, he bows his head and prays before he eats. But in the gym he’s a workhorse. His lifestyle, as much as his talent, gives him a chance to be special.

But a dedicated, humble demeanor without the requisite talent only can take a fighter so far. Don’t mistake Jones’ lack of bravado as a lack of faith in himself. He wants his shot something better, and he believes he has earned it.

“This is what he wants. This is what he needs, Peltz said of Jones’ coming-out party at Cowboys Stadium. “He needs to be on a big stage like this.
“We had other offers (from major promoters), but none compared to fighting in Cowboys Stadium. If Mike were 22 or 23, I’d probably think twice (about taking on a promotional partner), not that he’s old. But athletes today are in a hurry. This is the best move for Mike at this point, and for me.

“I could have held out and had him fight Kell Brook (the WBO’s No. 1-rated welterweight) in England, but dangling the carrot of the fight in Cowboys Stadium was rather a strong incentive.

Arum’s deal with Peltz and Hand calls for Jones to fight at least once a year before his natural constituency in Philadelphia or Atlantic City.