

The week after Manny Pacquiao fights Antonio Margarito, theres another important fight night.

If the organizers have anything to do with it, their entity might one day be seen as more important than the mega fight in Dallas. But if you live in America, you wont be able to see it on TV.

November 19 is the launch of the World Series of Boxing, or WSB. Its a professional boxing competition administered by AIBA, the world governing body of amateur boxing, along with IMG Events. IMG's other clients include crickets hugely successful Indian Premier League (IPL) and Major League Baseball. The boxers will be top amateurs, fighting without headgear, for five three-minute rounds scored under the professional ten point must system (by amateur judges).

Boxers are going to fight in teams (like the amusingly named Istanbulls) that represent cities in North America, Europe and Asia. Boxers will come from both the local area and from the ranks of top amateurs worldwide. The teams will fight within their conferences, before advancing to the finals.

Ivan Khodabakhsh, the Chief Operating Officer of the WSB, believes that a well governed league has a good chance to compete in the sphere of professional boxing, which is often marred by chaos. Khodabakhsh believe that a proliferation of titles and organisations and lack of governance has turned casual fans off boxing.

"We didn't want to duplicate professional boxing, we wanted to bring professional boxing into the 21st century, he said. "So we looked at the elements which were good and we tried to see what were the key factors for other sports which have been successful.

AIBA and Khodabakhsh also want to expand professional boxing into new markets. Teams from traditional boxing strongholds, like the Los Angeles Matadors and Mexico City Guerreros, will eventually compete with those from less familiar locales, like the Beijing Dragons (who have a TV deal in China) or, would you believe; the Dolce and Gabbana Milan Thunder.

For all its ambition, the WSB has already hit some major speed bumps. The Delhi, India franchise was replaced earlier this month by a Korean team when its major sponsor withdrew and it could not find an alternative financial backer.

This was a major blow for the league, one of the major goals of which was to capture the Indian and Chinese markets. When The Sweet Science spoke to Khodabakhsh before the Delhi withdrawal, he cited IMG Events experience in India with the IPL as a major factor in AIBA choosing them as a partner.

Its also worth asking whether the Miami Gallos taking on the Incheon Red Wings in Macau (where the WSB finals will be held) will resonate with American sports fans. Previous attempts

at worldwide leagues in hockey and American football have been dismal failures.

Boxers and experts The Sweet Science has spoken with have also questioned whether the series will be good for boxers health. The competition schedule may be quite punishing, even for amateurs who are used to fighting in tournaments. Amateurs might also have difficulty transitioning to a more aggressive professional style, even over five rounds.

Dr. Margaret Goodman, a Las Vegas Neurologist and former Chief Ringside Physician at the Nevada State Athletic Commission, has concerns about the format.

“Amateur and professional boxing are very different. If I am still correct, in amateur, the win is based on landing punches and has little to do with power shots. To transfer amateurs right into a pro arena without the right preparation can in of itself be dangerous, she said.

But Ivan Khodabakhsh maintains that the amateur ethos of care for the athlete will prevail over other considerations in the competition. Each team will have a doctor, brain scans and other health checks will be mandatory and suspensions will be respected.

Dr. Goodman agrees that having team doctors present in the gym, where most injury and head trauma happens, is a great development:

“I think it is great that supervising team docs will be present as long as they can have an active role. I mean that if a fighter is rocked, knocked down, they can stop the sparring, make certain the kid rests the appropriate amount of time and arrange medical follow-up.

The real winners out of the competition will be boxers. Amateurs who compete as pros in the World Series will be paid and will retain their eligibility for the Olympic Games. The pay scale doesnt compare to that of real professional boxing – it starts at \$25,000, some of which may be deducted for their national federation.

Nevertheless, the athletes are happy. For Australia super heavyweight Trent Rawlins, wholl fight for the Miami franchise, the WSB came along at just the right time.

“We were weighing up turning pro because we’ve been treated unfairly by boxing Australia, said Rawlins. “But I was very excited about the Olympics.

As for the pay: “Twenty five thousand is the bare minimum they can give you, but they’re giving me more than the minimum. That’s all I can say, Rawlins said.

“I see this as an opportunity. I believe WSB is going to take over all other forms of boxing. It’s going to be the number one boxing organisation out there.

Whether the WSB will have any success at all remains to be seen. It will need to clear some very big hurdles if AIBA hopes to compete with the old school variety of professional boxing. But you cant blame them for trying.

ALEX McCLINTOCK SPECIAL TO TSS: Intro To The World Series of Boxing

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