

IS THE MAIN EVENT ON YET? Off-TV Undercard Report

Written by Michael Woods
Friday, 12 March 2010 18:00

It's intervention time. Enough is enough. I don't care what focus groups say. I don't care if by and large people buy pay per views to see the main event, and chat and keep the sound off until the feature attraction. It is time for someone to clue in the sports' power brokers, and tell them they are not serving the sport or themselves by serving us hardcore fight fans dreck before the featured tiff. Three bouts preceded the Manny Pacquiao-Joshua Clottey main event at Cowboys Stadium in Dallas, and all of them showcased long stretches of listlessness, and sparring-level back and forth.

It's not just me; the HBO announce team laced into Top Rank, the card's promoter, during the Alfonso Gomez-Jose Luis Castillo "fight," which ended in pathetic fashion, with Castillo signaling the white flag on his stool.

But sometimes I feel like I'm in the minority harping on this; judging by the comments I see, a lot of you accept the status quo, and feel you get your money's worth by and large on these PPV cards, which feature too many retreads, never will bees and favors to managers. Weigh in in the comment section, if you are with me, or if you think I expect too much, TSS U. Bottom line, I say the undercard is an ad for the sport. You can pack it with fan friendly battles, and draw new fans to the sport, or you can turn off new eyeballs, and condition people to expect subpar material...Your choice, suits...Basically, you have me wrapped up, you have me on board, even if you continue this sad pattern. But I'm at the top five percent of the hardcore. 50,994 people too often visited the restroom, and the hot dog stand, instead of being enraptured by scintillating back and forth pugilism at Cowboys Stadium. Hopefully, you'll see the light, and give the fans what they deserve. Pay per view cards packed top to bottom with enticing fare. End rant...til the next display of putridity, the cynic in me says...

In the final fight before the main event at Cowboys Stadium in Dallas on Saturday night, Humberto Soto won a unanimous decision, by scores of 115-111, 117-109, 117-109, the announcement of which drew the most tepid of applause. Around the world, fight fans had no clue who won, because they'd long ago tunred down the volume, and glanced at their screen only long enough to make sure the main event wasn't starting.

The vacant WBC lightweight crown was up for grabs, for the record. Soto won the stat war, going 160-638, while Diaz went 90-634.

Soto (age 29; 134 1/4 pounds; from Mexico; entering at 50-7-2 with 32 kos; two time world champ; current super feather titlist) came in a winner of six straight, while Diaz (age 33; 134 pounds; from Chicago; entering at 35-2-1 with 17 kos; ex lightweight champ) fought once, a win against Jesus Chavez, after losing to Manny Pacquiao in 2008 (TKO9).

In the first, the lefty Diaz started bleeding above his right eyebrow. He then went down, off a right hook-left hook combo, and his glove touched the canvas. In the second, Soto popped a lead right which hit home frequently. Soto's movement proved problematic to the wide-stanced

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Diaz. His jab wasn't going to do any damage, and Soto knew it. The Mexican looked completely at ease through four. Manny Steward admitted that "I'm not really scoring the fight" during the sixth, which tells you a bit about the level of buzz and import in this squareoff. Diaz connected on just five punches a round through six, even though he kept chugging forward.

Diaz didn't go away. He stayed in pressure mode, and it looked like the cards would be close after the twelfth. Then again, Gale Van Hoy was on duty, so really, who the heck knew what the decision might look like...Diaz outlanded Soto in the ninth. His body work was more than annoying. But he hit the deck in the twelfth, off a six punch combo, at the end of the frame, his second two point round.

Alfonso Gomez (age 29; 145 pounds; living in California; entering at 21-4-2) battled Jose Luis Castillo (age 36; 144 pounds; from Mexico; entering at 60-9-1; former two time 135 pound champion) with Gomez' WBA cont-a-something or other welterweight tile on the line. Both men have illustrious feathers in their career caps: Castillo was in a fight of the century with Diego Castillo in 2005, while Gomez retired Arturo Gatti in 2007. "To have the crowd go through this type of fight is not fair," said HBO analyst Emanuel Steward, after seeing what both men had to offer in the first round. I'm in Manny's corner; I'll never understand Bob Arum's insistence on feeding PPV viewers hamburger undercards when they pay filet mignon fees...But hey, maybe rounds two through twelve would prove to be classic...

Er, no. But it beat the Duddy-Medina appetizer. But not by that much..Seriously, I think it's time for an intervention for Mr Arum. Most churches are more lively during service than was Cowboys Stadium for too damn much of the undercard action. I don't give a tinker's damn what the focus groups say, that people pay for the main event and don't care about the prelims. Baloney. Major league pile of Oscar Mayer. Like the UFC does, give them wars from start to finish, and people will be happy that they spend the dough, even if the main clash isn't A level. Really. Who needs a focus group to grasp this screamingly obvious fact? Seriously...I'd like to see Arum on a future episode of "Intervention," in a room with Kery Davis, Ross Greenburg, Marc Taffett and Todd deBoeuf. "This is a sorry excuse for an undercard fight on a major pay per view card," Max Kellerman said during round four. Jim Lampley called the scrap "inappropriate," but did make mention of the fact that Top Rank wanted to bolster the undercard with the return of Antonio Margarito.

This stinker ended after the fifth, as Castillo said 'no mas' on his stool.

In my mind, unless there is a verified injury to Castillo, the commission should yank his license, because otherwise there was no reason for a professional with pride to pull the plug. Jose Luis Castillo, unless he was injured, should exit the game for good, because he doesn't appear to have the drive to do it anymore.

Gomez went 92-356, while the quitter Castillo went 47-213.

In the pay-per-view opener, John Duddy (age 30; 160; 28-1, with 18 kos entering; from Ireland, fighting out of NYC) clashed with Michael "The Murder Man" Medina (age 23; 155 1/2; 23-1-2 entering, with 18 kos; from California, living in Mexico) in a scheduled ten rounder. Duddy is

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Duddy. He gets hit too often, especially from jabs and left hooks, and is still caught without a definitive identity. Brawler? Boxer? Hybrid? He's still figuring it out. He was showing a savvy concentration on landing a right to the body in the first couple rounds. Medina looked hesitant to be the aggressor early, but every now and again, he'd score clean. His hooks, especially, were purposeful. The HBO announce crew, Lampley, Steward and Kellerman, all agreed that Duddy has dulled in recent years; he used to be more of an "eye of the tiger" type of fighter, but some of that fire has dimmed. Perhaps that is the wiser course of action for a man who has a tendency to cut, and leaves himself open to easy countering when he lets loose. I say it is; this is the recipe for him to get to that one big money cashout fight, which will go a long way in making these years of sacrifice pay off. He's not fighting to entertain us, he's fighting to feed his family for the next thirty years. Over the last couple of years, Duddy has become a much more focused fighter. He doesn't have the lapses of concentration that used to plague him. Those lapses of concentration, though, when he'd see red, made him more fun to watch. Duddy got wobbled by a right to end the seventh, and he went to his corner wobbly. In the eighth, Medina didn't press the issue. He kept on backing up, instead of attempting to leverage his advantage. Steward said that Duddy's pop used to be at a 10 level, and is now a 6. The ref warned Medina for going low at the end of the round, and took a point from the underdog. Duddy drew blood, on the left cheek, in the ninth. He didn't go balls out to end the show on a high note, electing to simply go the safe route, get the win now, look stellar later.

We'd go the cards, which read 96-93 Duddy, 96-93 Medina, 96-93 Duddy. The stats read: 177-601, to 173-528, for Duddy.

Check back for George Kimball's comprehensive ringside report.