

This Weekend Will Not Stand As Promoter De La Hoya's Proudest Moment

Written by Ron Borges
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When Oscar De La Hoya first decided to go into the promotional business he said he did it for the boxers. He claimed he was going to be different, someone who would not adopt the same abusive practices of so many of his predecessors. So how did this weekend happen?

On the same day De La Hoya is promoting a fight he said only a few months ago should not happen, when he wheels in the well-shot Roy Jones, Jr. to face semi-retired Bernard Hopkins at Mandalay Bay, he is also co-promoting a fight in Manchester, England between WBA heavyweight champion David Haye and former champion John Ruiz. He has contractual agreements with both. In other words, he's become (Don) King For A Day.

Although De La Hoya has done many great things for boxing, this is not his proudest moment. It is a shameful one, in fact, because it is another example of how the corrupting nature of the sport seems to eventually infect everyone who enters it, even someone with all the good intentions De La Hoya once talked about.

The Roy Jones who will enter the ring at Mandalay Bay under the banner of Golden Boy Promotions is a 41-year-old fighter who is 5-5 in his last 10 fights and suffered three brutal knockouts during that span, including one only four months ago in Australia against former light heavyweight champion Danny Green in what was supposed to have been a tune-up for the Hopkins fight. Some fear it may have been, after Green knocked Jones out two minutes into the fight.

Immediately after it was over, De La Hoya blogged the following: "This is one of those cases you see all the time, a great fighter who doesn't know when to call it a day...You can see that he's not the same."

Yet De La Hoya is adding and abetting Jones by allowing him to fight under his promotional banner against one of his business partners, the 45-year-old Hopkins. It is a rematch of a 17-year-old fight, one Jones won to help propel himself to stardom. For years Hopkins sought a rematch but terms could never be agreed upon until, frankly, both had no one else to turn to and so they will be facing each other in what Jones all but admitted is more like a benefit retirement dinner than a competitive boxing match.

Several days ago Jones was asked why anyone should spend \$49.95 of their hard-earned money to buy this fight on pay-per-view. The proper answer was they shouldn't but instead Jones unknowingly revealed what this exercise is about – greed and self-delusion.

"Because we've laid down our hard-earned lives to put on two stellar careers over that 17-year period [since the first fight]," Jones said. "So why not lay down your hard-earned money to watch two guys who put their hard-earned lives on the line to entertain you people for 17 years. They understand who we are. They know who we are. They've watched us for years. We've entertained them for years, so why not give back to us and let us go at it one more time for the

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ages?"

For the aged would have been more accurate.

Hopkins (50-5, 32 KO) can at least argue he's been active and successful the past seven years but Jones can say no such thing. He has not won a meaningful fight since he beat John Ruiz seven years ago to claim the WBA heavyweight title. It was a proper moment to walk away but the guy who never wanted to fight when he was capable of it now finds himself unable to stop when he can't.

That is the dangerous trap Jones has put himself in and De La Hoya has helped make it possible. Perhaps Jones and Hopkins would have found a way to square off anyway but the fact is no one is interested, barely anyone is covering it and unless insanity rules the earth on Final Four weekend, no one is going to buy it. So unless you enjoy seeing a shot fighter take shots, what's the point?

Hopkins is far from heavy handed but the way Jones has looked the past few years you don't need heavy hands to knock him out now. You just need hands, which Hopkins still possesses.

Joe Calzaghe didn't have the power to do that so instead he beat Jones like a rug hanging on a fence for spring cleaning. He cut him up, slapped him around and by the end thoroughly embarrassed him. It was sad to watch and leads you to wonder if they still have a boxing commission in the state of Nevada since Mark Ratner left, if they'll approve a match like this one.

Antonio Tarver beat Jones from pillar to post before knocking him out. Glen Johnson would have but he knocked him stiff before he had time to. Then came Green, who blew on Jones and he went down like a building made of straw. Does the Nevada Commission not have a videotape machine?

Jones (54-6, 40 KO) made obvious he knows what he is these days when he was asked why he thought Hopkins was willing to fight him now, so long after a rematch has any meaning. His reply was sadly accurate.

"I can't regret that man not wanting to get into the ring with me until my career is over," Jones said, incredibly. "The only reason he's fighting me now is because he feels like I'm done. He feels like I'm washed up."

Who doesn't feel that way? Not even his long-time trainer, Alton Merkerson, who has repeatedly admitted the past few years that Jones is in decline while reminding everyone that he knows when to stop a fight.

He may, but when you're getting knocked out two minutes after it starts there's no time to stop it. All you can do is pick up what's left when it's over.

Unlike Jones, Hopkins has retained a measure of his skills, although not as much as he once

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had. He remains smart, tactical and able to avoid being hit flush very often. Jones has none of those attributes anymore. He is simply an empty vessel, one who once feared ending up blind and nearly mute, like his friend of long ago, Gerald McClellan, but now seems to have forgotten that possibility exists every time you step into a boxing ring. Maybe that's the most damning sign of his decline. He no longer remembers what can happen to you inside those ropes.

McClellan has been unable to function since the night he went to war with Nigel Benn, trapped in a mist from which he will never emerge. Jones always refused to go visit him until he was done boxing, saying it would unhinge him. It's time to visit before he ends up unhinged himself.

Perhaps the saddest part of this is that the entire idea of the two of them fighting is pointless. It leads neither anywhere, except closer to a place no one wants to think about.

Neither is going to come out of this with a win that will increase their marketability. As it is, no one is buying tickets, no one wanted to buy the fight and no one can understand why De La Hoya got his company involved in this fiasco.

At least the fact De La Hoya has both sides of the Haye-Ruiz fight is understandable. Haye is the WBA heavyweight champion and perhaps a fighter on the rise. If he wins he's a cinch to get a big unification fight with one of the Klitschkos, which means many millions for all involved. Ruiz is the first and only Latino to win the heavyweight championship and a natural for De La Hoya's company. If he wins, there's another big fight for him out there because he will have the only belt not worn by the brothers Klitschko and they want it.

So one can at least understand the business side of Golden Boy's involvement in Haye-Ruiz even though people used to scream bloody murder when King did this kind of stuff. In the end, that Golden Boy Promotions is involved in such promotions though, says more about what the business of boxing is doing to Oscar De La Hoya than what De La Hoya has done for boxing.

What it says about Roy Jones, Jr. is that he's reached the stage in his boxing life that they all do – he needs someone to protect him from himself. Too bad in boxing nobody like that exists.