For the past four or five years ESPN Classic Sports has shown two hours of classic boxing on Tuesday nights. That's the good news. The bad news is they show the same fights over and over. This past Tuesday night they showed Frazier-Bonavena I, and Clay-Jones. I can easily see the interest in both of these fights.

Bonavena was Frazier's 11th pro bout, and he dropped Frazier twice. Jones was Clay's 18th fight and there was some controversy over the scoring and decision. Although I don't see why, I thought it was close, but a clear Clay win. If these were rare showings it would be great. However, both of these fights have been shown on ESPN Classic Sports countless times. It's no longer unique to see them?

If you're like me, you were ecstatic when you heard ESPN Classic was buying the fight film collection of Bill Cayton. Bill Cayton and his partner Jimmy Jacobs owned a company called "The Big Fights Inc." Big Fights Inc. held all the rights to most of the fight films that were in existence through the 1990's.

Big Fights Inc. was the brainchild of Bill Cayton and the late Jimmy Jacobs. Jacobs, started collecting fights after the controversy surrounding the first Louis-Walcott title fight. What happened was Jacobs missed seeing the fight and only knew about it from the newspaper coverage. Most boxing fans are aware that the fight ended in a controversial decision in favor of heavyweight champion Joe Louis.

At the end of the 15th round Louis left the ring before the decision was announced. Louis was totally disappointed and felt he was out-boxed by Jersey Joe. Louis had to be summoned back to the ring for the decision. In the opinion of most who actually saw the fight, Walcott should've been declared the winner. The controversy over the decision is what spurred Jacobs to want to see the fight. He was frustrated that he had no way or access of seeing a replay of the fight immediately. He wanted to see for himself if the immortal "Brown Bomber" was really bettered by Walcott that night. This was the beginning of Jacobs' obsession in the fight film business.

Jim Jacobs is widely known as the greatest Handball player of all-time. He was also quite a boxing enthusiast. In his travels to other countries to give Handball exhibitions, he began buying fight films that were no longer available in the United States. In 1961 Jacobs merged his collection with another collector, Bill Cayton, who owned the "Greatest Fights of the Century". Cayton at the time was a network Television producer, which gave him access to many network fight telecast. Together they formed a corporation called "The Big Fights Inc." to restore and preserve fight films.

Big Fights Inc. produced over one thousand boxing features and documentaries. They were nominated for three Academy Awards, for "Legendary Champions", "The Heavyweight Champions", and "Jack Johnson". They also produced "The Fighters", which is a documentary on the first Frazier-Ali fight. This feature was shown in theatre's throughout the country months

after the fight. Big Fights Inc. has the largest library of boxing films in the world, with over 16,000 films.

In March of 1988 Jacobs died of Leukemia. He had been diagnosed with the fatal disease for sometime and even those closest to him were unaware of it until his passing. His partner Bill Cayton and Steve Lott over saw the fight collection after Jacobs passing until selling them to ESPN for what has been reported at upwards of a 100 million dollars!

When this deal was announced, I was thrilled and looked forward to Tuesday night. I thought great, I can finally see how great Sugar Ray Robinson was as a welterweight, or how great Benny Leonard was. Wrong, no such luck. Since ESPN Classic Boxing has been on the air we've been fed nothing but a steady diet of Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson fights. Being a fight collector myself for about the last 25 years, I can tell you that the two fighters for which there is an abundance of films are Ali and Tyson!

From the late 70's through to about 1984, I used to purchase fight films from Jacobs himself out of his New York office. If you caught him when he had time, he would talk boxing non-stop. If he didn't have time he would say, Frank, I can't talk now, call me next week. However, he had one Golden Rule. He said to me, Frank, and I'm paraphrasing here, I trust and believe you, but if it ever gets back to me that you gave out or sold any of the fights you got from me, I'll never do another transaction with you.

Back To ESPN Classic. My contention with them is how many times do we have to be shown the same fights over and over and over? We all know that Ali beat Foreman and Douglas upset Tyson, yet we have been shown those fights continuously. Haven't we seen Clay-Jones, Frazier-Bonavena I, Foreman-Peralta I, Robinson-Fullmer III, and Liston-Machen countless times?

Overall, there is a base of about 15 or 20 fights that have been constantly shown over the last four or five years? Its to the point now that I don't even check the guide on Tuesday nites to see what fights are being aired. The odds are that I've probably seen it many times already, just as you have. I have no doubt that most hard-core boxing fans have to be disappointed! How could you not be?

Here's the reason why I think we get the same select few fights repeatedly. I believe that ESPN is greedy! They are so afraid that if they show some of the really good stuff that we'll tape it and have it in our collection. And they're right, but so what? They have over 16,000 fights, why can't they give us one or two new ones per month? It's not like they are going to run out of fights. No, it's just their way to keep us at their mercy, and hoping to see something we haven't.

The bottom line is that it's greed. They fear so much that if they show the good stuff, their collection will lose some of its value because we will record these treasured fights. I don't know about you, but I'd love to see Robinson-Gavilan, or one of the Charles-Moore fights? However, It's all about money, and they don't want anyone else to have access to any of the unseen footage. It's that simple!

I've tried calling ESPN and complaining about seeing the same fights over and over. They have responded in one of two ways, depending on who you get when you call. The first lie I've been told is that they will be showing some fights never seen before later this year or early next year. The second lie I've been told is that they are giving the public what they want to see. Another words, according to ESPN Classic Boxing, all the fans want to see are Ali and Tyson. Somehow I don't belive this.

For what reason do we get stuck seeing the same fights repeatedly other than ESPN fearing that we'll copy them? The only reason I can think of is that maybe part of the agreement between Big Fights and ESPN states that they can only air certain fights. If that's the case, then why did Big Fights sell them? It's not like they can profit from them any more since they no longer own the rights.

In my opinion ESPN Classic doesn't care about what the fight fans want to see. They'll just continue to tell us what we want to see. I believe ESPN Classic Boxing's concept is the following. Lets show mostly heavyweights because that's who most fight fans want to see. Lets give them some vintage Ali and early Tyson, and sprinkle in some bouts from the 50's and that will appease them. Who cares about Harry Greb or Sam Langford, they won't bring us ratings.

Lastly, in my opinion ESPN Classic doesn't have enough boxing people in the decision or selection process. The bottom line is Ali and Tyson get the ratings, so that's who we'll continue to see. However, don't ever be fooled into thinking or believing that ESPN really cares about boxing, or the fans. Because they don't! If they did they would give us more than just the same old same old?