As the end of another year approaches, there's no need to invoke Charles Dickens to describe what went on in boxing. It was neither the best of times nor the worst of times. It was just too much time spent on The Fight That Never Took Place.

For the second straight year the sport could not deliver The Fight, the only one fans universally wanted and even casual fans craved – the mix between Floyd Mayweather, Jr. vs. Manny

Pacquiao. No one has to be singled out for blame for that failure because this time there's plenty to go around on both sides. The larger issue is what does it say about a sport when it cannot deliver its top event?

What would the NFL be without the Super Bowl? Where would major league baseball be without the World Series? Golf without the Masters? College basketball without March Madness?

They would all be less than they could be and so it was with boxing this year. Having said that, the sport was not without its signature moments. It was not bereft of nights that left those of us with an abiding (and often unrequited) love for prize fighting with good reason to hope for the future.

Three times promoter Bob Arum took the sport into massive stadium venues just like the good (very) old days and each time boxing drew a far larger crowd than its many critics expected. Twice those fights involved the sport's leading ambassador, Pacquiao, who brought in crowds of 40,000 to 50,000 fans into Cowboys Stadium against inferior opponents Joshua Clottey and Antonio Margarito. Imagine what he might have done had Mayweather been in the opposite corner?

While both fights were, as expected, lopsided affairs, they showcased the one boxer who has transcended his sport's confining walls to become a cultural icon and world celebrity. Pacquiao alone put boxing (or at least one boxer) on the cover of TIME and into the pages of such varied publications as Esquire, GQ, The Wall Street Journal, the American Airlines in-flight magazine and even Atlantic Monthly.

As history has proven time and again, that is what happens when boxing has a compelling personality to sell it and Pacquiao is that. Mayweather is such a person as well, but for different reasons.

The one night he appeared in a boxing ring, he set the year's pay-per-view standard against Shane Mosley while also leaving a first hint of dark mystery when he was staggered by two stinging right hands in the second round.

Mayweather was momentarily in trouble for the first time in his career but the moment passed quickly and Mosley never had another. By the end he had been made to look old and futile, a faded athlete who'd had his chance and was unable to do anything with it. So it goes in this harsh sport when the sands are running out of the hour glass.

As always there were some surprising upsets, most notably Jason Litzau's domination of an uninterested and out of shape Celestino Caballero and Sergio Martinez's one-punch demolishment of Paul Williams. The latter was not so much an upset as it was a stunning reminder that when someone makes a mistake against a highly skilled opponent in this sport they don't end up embarrassed. They end up unconscious.

SHOWTIME did all it could to further the future of the sport, offering up a continuation of its

interminably long but still bold Super Six super middleweight tournament as well as the launching of a short form bantamweight tournament which already gave fans to two stirring and surprising finishes with Joseph Agbeko decisioning Jhonny Perez and Abner Mares upsetting Victor Darchinyan in a battle of contusions.

While the Super Six has had its problems – including several of the original six pulling out – it also lifted the profile of former Olympic gold medalist Andre Ward from nearly unknown to the cusp of universal recognized as the best super middleweight in the world this side of Lucian Bute. If Ward continues winning he'll get to Bute soon enough because that's why SHOWTIME signed a TV deal with the Canadian and America may get its next boxing star if Ward proves to be what I think he is – which is still underrated and underappreciated.

HBO and HBO pay-per-view put on 23 shows, few of them compelling and many of them paying big money to the wrong people while doing little or nothing to grow the sport that has helped make their network rich. But they did have the knockout of the year - Martinez's second round destruction of Williams – and some fights in the lower weight classes that were left you wanting more.

Two new names popped up who are causing the kind of fan reaction that also gives us hope for 2011 - American Brandon Rios and Mexican Saul Alvarez. They are two of the sport's brightest young prospects because each comes to the arena the old-fashioned way – carrying nothing but bad intentions.
Aggression and knockouts still sell boxing faster than anything else and each exhibited plenty of both this year and left fans wanting to see more. Alvarez is already a star in Mexico without having yet won a world title and Rios is the definition of "promise.'' Whether the star will continue to shine and promise will be fulfilled may be answered next year and so we wait anxiously to find out.

Backed by Golden Boy Promotions, there is no reason 2011 shouldn't be Alvarez's year and if it is people will notice and remember him because he has a crowd-pleasing style that is all about what sells most.

That is what boxing needs more of – fresh faces and new stars... so as fans we should root for guys like Alvarez, Ward, Rios and young Brit Amir Khan, who is a star in England but still a question mark with a questionable chin but a fighter's heart here in the U.S.

Those guys and others not yet as well known are the future of boxing, a sport that for too long has been recycling the likes of Mosley (as it will again in May for one last beating against Pacquiao in a fight that's a joke), Bernard Hopkins (who can still fight although it is unclear why he bothers or where it's all headed), Roy Jones and, sadly, even 48-year-old Evander Holyfield, who continues to delude himself but not many other people into believing he will soon unify the heavyweight title again.
If fighters like Ward, Alvarez, Rios, Khan, WBC welterweight champion Andre Berto and middleweight king Sergio Martinez continue their rise they could be the antidote for the art of the retread that Arum and Golden Boy have been forcing fans to buy the past few years at the expense of what boxing needs most – fresh faces.

The heavyweight division, which many believe determines the relevancy of boxing to the larger world, remains a vast desert of disinterest here in the US. The Klitschko brothers, Vitali and Wladimir, hold 75 per cent of the title belts but few peoples' imaginations in the US, although to be fair they are European superstars and don't really need U.S. cable TV money to thrive economically.

Each defended their titles twice this year, Vitali against lame competition (Albert Sosnowski and Shannon Briggs) and Wladimir against better fighters (Sam Peter and Eddie Chambers) but not competitive ones. Sadly, there is no American on the horizon to challenge them, a comment on the division and on our country, where the athletes who used to be Joe Louis or Muhammad Ali now opt for the easier and frankly safer road of the NFL or the NBA. Who can blame them considering all the nonsense a fighter has to go through to just make a living these days?

The one heavyweight match that would be compelling and might lift the sport up for at least a night would be either of the Klitschkos facing lippy WBA champion David Haye. The fast-talking Brit claims to not be ducking them but he's had more maladies befall him after shouting from the rooftops how much he wants to challenge them that you have to wonder if Haye is simply a case of big hat no cattle syndrome.

For the sake of the sport, we should all be lighting candles each night in hopes our prayers will be answered and Haye will finally agree to meet one of them. It may not prove to be much of a fight but at least it will give us something to talk about for a few months.

Whatever Haye and the Klitschkos decide the fighter with the most upside at the moment however seems to be Sergio Martinez. He has matinee idol looks, a big enough punch to put Paul Williams to sleep with one shot and a work ethic second to none. The Argentine fighter had a year for himself, starting with a drubbing of Kelly Pavlik followed by his demolishment of Williams. Those kinds of victories, coupled with his Oscar De La Hoya-like looks, are the type of things that if HBO or SHOWTIME would get behind him could allow Martinez to capture the attention of both fight fans and more casual ones.

In general, Hispanics fighters continued to dominate much of the sport's front pages with Juan Manuel Marquez's two victories in lightweight title fights leading that storyline. His war with Michael Katsidis is a strong candidate for Fight of the Year and his technical skill and calm demeanor make him the uncrowned challenger to Pacquiao. The two have unfinished business that should be settled this year if Arum stops standing in the way.

Two other fighters who gave us moments to remember in 2010 were Juan Manuel Lopez, who knocked out three solid opponents including highly respected Mexican warrior Rafael Marquez, and Giovani Segura, who won four times (that's three years work for Mayweather) in 2010, all by knockout. Along the way, Segura defeated one of the great minimum weight fighters in history, slick Ivan Calderon, to win the belt on Aug. 28.

Lastly, boxing gave us another magical cinematic moment as well with the release of "The Fighter,'' a film based on the life and hard times of junior welterweight scrapper Micky Ward. The film has won rave reviews and many awards and seems likely to have several of its actors

nominated for Academy Awards, most notable Christian Bale for his sadly humorous portrayal of Ward's troubled half brother, former fighter Dickie Ecklund.

Boxing has a long history of providing the framework for memorable movies and it did it again with "The Fighter,'' a film that did more for boxing than any promoter did all year.

All in all, it wasn't the best of years for boxing but it was a good year that picked up speed in the final months and, like that great golf shot you finally hit out of the rough on the 18th, left us with reasons to hope for a better year in 2011. If somehow it gives us Mayweather-Pacquiao, the emergence of Alvarez and Rios, the ascension of Martinez and Haye vs. the best available Klitschko in addition to the kind of solid performances that always come along, it could be a year to remember.

Comment on this article

brownsugar says:

Fights to look forward to : Vitali K. gets his most dangerous challenger in the form of former Cuban Amateur Star Odlanier Solis (don't let the size fool you). ... The most Incredibly Dangerous Middleweight on the planet that nobody ever heard of Gennady Golovkin is negotiating a fight with French champ N'Dam N'Jikam. and Donaire faces off against Montiel for bantamweight supremacy. ...Fights that make you say hmmmmm: The Chosen One Ronald Hearns gets a shot at Felix Sturm s title in Germany where they apparently like mismatches against American boxers,.. (and this after Sturm denied Pirog a unification shot by saying that he wasn't well know enough). the beer swilling, and chain smoking Mayorga gets a shot at Cotto,.. (a potentially dangerous fight for Cotto because Mayorga will be weighing as much as a light heavyweight by fight time and could posssibly rough Cotto up with his wildman style if he's not careful). and finally K-9 Bundridge is trying to slither away from a showdown with the recently demolished Paul Williams by saying that he doesn't want to waist time with undeserving young up and comers like Paul when he should be getting the super fights with the like of Pacman instead...hmmmm. Fights I'd like to see: lets see Brandon Rios duke it out with his old rival and roommate Ortiz,.. plenty of bad blood exists and this would serve as a serious litmus test for Ortiz. and finally Pirog,.. Floyd,.. Dawson,.. and newcomer Edwin Rodriguez, vs anybody .....plus Mares vs Agbeko is high on my list... dueces...

Radam G says:

Looking back, 2010 in boxing was not that great. It was mainly the year of the hyped, green fighters. And the FKO of the most hyped fighter -- Paul Williams -- on the planet. Williams was lucky not to fight alcoholic Kelly Pavlik. If it were not for the MRSA infection on KP's hand, he'd have kayoed the hyped-up PW. Then again, if the bout were not stopped with Kermit Cintron, PW would have gotten kayoed in that one. Of course all that is my humble opinion. As it was my

humble opinion that Sergio Martinez would kayo that hyped job EARLY! And he DID! In 2011, a lot of these green hyped-up jobs will be eating defeat. At the top of the list is Dessert Storm -- I mean "Desert Storm" Tim Bradley. PW was the most hyped long, tall pugilist. TB is the most hyped short, muscled one. Those excess muscles will be the cause of his getting taken down. The sucka is obsessed with excessive weight training and body building, not old-schooled boxing methods of training. Dude fight as tight as a drum. Boxers should look more like tennis players and swimmers, not weightlifters and body builders. And the loosey-goosey fighting is what is suppose to be in that squared jungle. If Bradley would get all that muscle-building syet out of his body, he'd be a lightweight or maybe a featherweight. Wow! Ronald Hearns is not ready for the BIG TIme. Somebody knows something that those not in the know don't know. The Felix Strum who I've seem would kayo Ronny H in a New York minute. Felix has either gone down quickly, or the fixed is in. Money May, with quick-spreading arthritis all over his body, will be defeated in 2011 or fight a bum or two then retire. [30-something for a Mayweather is rapid aging of the bones, hardening of the lungs, diabetes and high-blood pressure.] There are three fighters who Money May should and probably will stay away from. The super hyped-up kid wonder Saul Alvarez will be crushed in 2011, if he fights the wrong champion. His green arse has been matched so well that the people around him have become delusional, and believe that the kid has the IT factor. NYET! Holla!

ultimoshogun says:

I'm a little late to the party here at the new look TSS, but just wanna wish you all a safe and happy new year...I'm looking forward to hopefully get on here and talk boxing with you fellas on a more regular basis....TSS, the best boxing community on the web....oh yeah, hey Roast, thanx for the smoke signal buddy...see ya guys around in 2011!!

MisterLee says:

Boxing gets better every time mayweather retires. i didn't even know much about miguel cotto until mayweather retired, and for a year and a half the 147 lb division was the hottest division with cotto, mosley, berto, williams, clottey, pacquiao... cintron and collazo too...all that would have fought each other too... then may came out of retirement and mixed everything up... he promised a fight with pacquiao twice, while pacquiao went thru hatton and cotto, may was NOT fighting clottey, williams, mosley, williams, nor cintron at 147... no good fights could be made outside of pacquiao fights... and eventually the combination of pacquiao and floyd weighed down the division... with williams being opted out of any fights agst cotto, mosley, or the protected berto after the collazo fight... he had no choice but to 154, and 160, fighting winky wright, cintron, and martinez twice, while cintron and cotto too moved up to 154 b/c they either had their chance with pac, or not at all, and cintron knew floyd didn't want a piece of him, high risk, low reward, the opposite of a marquez fight at 144. so now all the good fighters scrammed from 2009-2010 from 147 b/c pacquiao's fights, their 3 fights took up a year in boxing, and the best at 147 didn't have a chance at fighting them or getting a rematch. There you have it, if floyd had stayed retired, pacquiao, cintron, cotto, williams, berto, collazo (maybe?), clottey would have had a chance to fight each other, earn new fans, and make 147 the best division... however, good thing we have 126, 140, and now 118 to save these sorry excuses for scum at 147 and 154, wait sorry, 150, or 151 diamond belt? 168 is turning out okay slowly, 160 could be

red hot between clottey, sturm, pirog, and martinez, and angulo at 154 and rios at 135 along with robert guererro, and khan/bradley/alexander/maidana at 140. that could save boxing. everything else, all good. two last thingsr three: floyd, stay retired, boxing is doing just well without you, arum can be great and arum can suck, please be consistent, and pacquiao? you sold out, this is a crap fight, and it's the first time you disappointed the fans, thank you very much. oh yeah, look forward to seeing more vanes marchinyson, and the new kirkland. holler! oh yeah, good article mr. borges! enjoyed reading it!

MisterLee says:

sup shogun! check out this bantam weight fight eddie wineland vs. ken stone or google it, ends quickly and distinctly... ufc merges with wec, including lighter weight divisions. [url]http://www.facebook.com/video/video.php?v=684070934275 happy new year! here's the ending gif file in case the video couldn't play [url]http://www.mmatko.com/ken-stone-vs-eddie-wineland-fight-video-slam-wec-53-gif/ holler! so shogun should fight next year, how's shogun evans look? pc! or shogun rematch with griffin, or gsp vs. silva/? pc! fo' sho! holler at smiley c, bring us some laughs, fo's ho!

MisterLee says:

some nice fights on youtube from my second favorite site: [url]www.badlefthook.com [url]http://www.badlefthook.com/2010/12/7/1863033/youtube-links-to-the-top-fights-of-the-year#storyjump anybody read [url]www.leave-it-in-the-ring.com . Our Frank Z writes for them and their radio show is killer. holler!

Condor says:

It was indeed a down year for boxing, and particularly HBO. I just wish Showtime had HBO's budget, because they know what they're doing over there. HBO, and Greenburg specifically, are just lost and have absolutely no clue what the fans want. Or maybe worse, they do know and they just don't care. HBO's boxing division is sure to implode if its 2011 programming is anything like 2010 and 2009 (you might as well throw 2008 in there as well). Its ineptitude is at Enron levels. ESPN reported that the Klitschkos are allowing Haye to pick a brother and it'll be 50/50. Hopefully that comes to pass and we see Wladimir-Haye before July (he won't pick VK). I'll watch Pacquiao-Mosley, just because it's Pacquiao, but have no interest whatsoever as Mosley has nothing left, and is unlikely to get any younger and less shot by fight-night. Hopefully one of them sustains an injury in training and it's postponed and cancelled. For 2011, my hope is simply this: The best are fighting the best.

MisterLee says:

to hbo's credit, they basically didn't let diaz fight anyone else until he rematched malignaggi. that's one good thing, but was that last year? i'm getting lost in the time machine...

ultimoshogun says:

What's up MisterLee, you ever get started on your MMA training? Yeah, Shogun's most likely gonna wreck Evans the same way Machida did, after that who knows, maybe Rampage or Griffin...Jon "Bones" Jones is on his way up, but he ain't ready for my boy, Shogun...GSP's a man amongst boys at 170..i'd like to see him and Spider at a catch weight, but not before Spider vs Belfort.

Editor Mike says:

[QUOTE=Condor;509]It was indeed a down year for boxing, and particularly HBO. I just wish Showtime had HBO's budget, because they know what they're doing over there. HBO, and Greenburg specifically, are just lost and have absolutely no clue what the fans want. Or maybe worse, they do know and they just don't care. HBO's boxing division is sure to implode if its 2011 programming is anything like 2010 and 2009 (you might as well throw 2008 in there as well). Its ineptitude is at Enron levels. ESPN reported that the Klitschkos are allowing Haye to pick a brother and it'll be 50/50. Hopefully that comes to pass and we see Wladimir-Haye before July (he won't pick VK). I'll watch Pacquiao-Mosley, just because it's Pacquiao, but have no interest whatsoever as Mosley has nothing left, and is unlikely to get any younger and less shot by fight-night. Hopefully one of them sustains an injury in training and it's postponed and cancelled. For 2011, my hope is simply this: The best are fighting the best.[/QUOTE]

Enron...tee hee

Isaiah says:

HAPPY NEW YEAR EVERYONE! I read recently that so called "fans" voted Manny Pacquiao the fighter of the year for 2010 for the Ring Magazine. I'm REALLY starting to not like the "casual fan" because of their ignorance. Popularity isn't everything. It's time for someone else to get fighter of the year. Pacquiao or Mayweather simply did NOT do enough to try and get it again and that's the bottom line! How about Sergio Martinez get his props?! The man dismantled Kelly Pavlik for the middleweight championship of the world and then just ran down Paul Wiliams in a rematch with a perfect counter that just made the closeness of their first match look stupid! Sergio Martinez is fighter of the year! It's NOT up for debate! Only Juan Manuel Marquez had a year that's in the same ballpark and he gets comeback of the year, hands down!

Editor Mike says:

For the good of the sport, it's fine with me that Manny wins. We know the truth, we don't have to have everyone acknowledge it.