*Photo by Levin*I don't wish to pile on Detroit, but when folks heard where I spent last weekend, the reply was always an incredulous, "Why?"

It's a valid question.

For months leading up to the junior welter unification bout between Timothy Bradley (WBO) and Devon Alexander (WBC), boxing writers were killing the event. Promoters Gary Shaw and Don King had placed it in the Silverdome in Pontiac, Michigan, which is about 40 minutes outside of Detroit.

Bradley is from Palm Springs, CA, and even when fighting close to home is not yet a draw. Alexander does good numbers in his native St. Louis, MO. This one had dud written all over it, at least from a commercial perspective. And the 2.3 rating it received on HBO verifies this. The quality of the participants and the match-up could not be questioned.

It's fairly clear the promoters had to pay a tiny site fee, and thus were happy to spend as little resources and effort doing their job. Typically, HBO paid the fighters handsome purses and spent a good chunk of change in advertising. No matter; it would never be enough.

The 80,000-seat Silvedome is a story unto itself. The former home of the Detroit Lions, the Pistons, WrestleMania III when they packed in a record-setting 93,000 and the same amount came for a Mass led by Pope John Paul II. Every big band or performer of the '70s through the '80s played here—Elvis, Led Zeppelin, The Who, the Rolling Stones, U2, Aerosmith, Madonna, et al.

The construction cost in 1975 for the facility was $56 million. In 2009 it sold for $583,000. No, that figure isn't missing a zero. The stadium is now a forlorn, colossal husk. The weather was frigid when we approached the stadium on Saturday and the building couldn't have looked loonier or spookier had it sunk to the deepest depths of the Atlantic. There's nothing surrounding it, other than endless acres of unused parking space. The emptiness was only magnified by the supposed 6,247 boxing fans that showed up (to my eyes, it was about half that many) to watch two of our better undefeated African-Americans go at it.

All of this is emblematic of the continual decline of the beleaguered Motor City—not to mention

the state of boxing in the US—which is just a well-documented example of vast swaths of this country, where we no longer make things and jobs long ago vanished. It's one thing to hear about it or watch a news report from the comfortable confines of your home; it's another to see it with your own eyes. I live in New York City, ride the trains all over, and visit some rough neighborhoods from time to time. I thought I was grounded in reality and conscious of the plight of others. Nothing could have prepared me for this. Driving around Detroit and making the trip to Pontiac with my travel companion and fellow writer, Kenneth Bouhairie, we watched in silent disbelief. We both felt like characters in a post-apocalyptic story, perhaps Cormac McCathy's "The Road." Kenneth hails from Ghana, Africa, and has witnessed Third World poverty first hand, but this was still potent stuff.

"This is America?" he asked. "Maybe we shouldn't be talking about the starving children in Africa with this in our backyard."

To counter this, we decided to make the best of our situation, booking a room at what we understood to be the nicest hotel in downtown Detroit, a Westin (awkwardly named the Westin Book Cadillac), knocked back a little Grey Goose, ate porterhouse steak at a great restaurant called Roast, and even upped our game in the car rental department: a Cadillac STS Sedan. All of this pampering didn't initially hurt our outlook on life…But upon noticing the emptiness of the hotel and the soulless freezing streets and touring the city in our banging ride, guilt billowed in our conscience. We also felt stupid when we learned that the Caddie is the number one stolen vehicle in Detroit because the parts are easy to sell. Thus, we never parked the rig except for the valet parking at the hotel. "If we get carjacked," I told Kenneth, "we are kind of asking for it."

Before we left for the undercard we rubbernecked at the defunct Michigan Central Station, the gorgeous Beaux-Arts rail depot built in 1913 by the same architects of NY's Grand Central Station. I imagine it was equally magnificent in its day. Amtrak service stopped in 1988 and it is now the biggest haunted house I've ever seen. Besides out-of-town gawkers like myself, the most action it now gets is in Michael Bay movies ("Transformers" and "The Island"), the title sequence of Eminem's "8 Mile," and the ABC crime drama "Detroit 1-8-7."

As we drove on, nothing felt so much like a tour of the Titantic as the above M.C.S., because it wasn't as beautiful, but most of what we drove by for the next two hours was decaying and boarded up. Southwest Detroit is full of humongous factories that sit silent. Signage with flaking paint and unlit neon for restaurants, auto parts, hair salons, bars, strip bars, you name it, were still there—but the lights were off and nobody was home. We barely saw a soul, not even an alley cat. On the rare occasion we passed someone that was clearly destitute, he would be curiously still in the frosty weather; sitting on broken steps or on the side of the highway, as if Waiting For Godot. Abandoned cars were picked apart as if by vultures, and sometimes they served as makeshift homes. Detroit is vast, 143 square miles; you could fit Manhattan, Boston and San Francisco within its borders and have room to spare. It's the emptiest city I've ever experienced.

As we made our way to Pontiac, we got to thinking about other aspects of the culture at large that are on life-support. Boxing never being far from our minds, we reminisced about the original Kronk Gym and the incredible world champions it churned out starting with Hilmer Kenty in

1980. But even the revered Emanuel Seward couldn't keep the city from shuttering the original subterranean space. The Kronk is no longer the Kronk, neither the caliber of fighters that wear its signature yellow and red, nor the Detroit boxing scene as a whole. Manny Steward, though, is still going strong, with Waldimir Klitschko, Miguel Cotto, Chad Dawson and Andy Lee among his charges.

I always take particular pleasure going to HBO fights live and watching the off-camera interplay between Manny, Larry and Lamps. We all know Lampley's wiring is closer to Johnny Tapia's than, say, Al Bernstein. Lest you forget, just Youtube his angrily shouting "BANG!" over 20 times in about 20 seconds during Pacquaio-Clottey. In person, he exudes an almost Manson-like intensity, and everyone from the make-up lady to the various production coordinators gave the blow-by-blow ace a wide berth. The man runs hot.

Merchant's more internal and sparing in his movements. He bows his head for long periods of time as he collects his thoughts, which are more often than not sage and well put. There is no one on the horizon that I've seen that will fill his shoes, or can even wear his old socks. It was nice to see him out there again, as Max Kellerman does the majority of gigs these days. Manny, I'm not crazy about most of his commentary but he's such a cool, likeable customer who has a way of making you feel good. Beyond his Hall of Fame credentials, I think that's a big part of his gift. There are worse people to be stuck with when you're in a desolate fight camp for 10 weeks. I can see how he builds rather than destroys fighters' spirits.

The venue was scaled down to fit a crowd of 10,000, but the shoddy curtain used to screen off the other 70,000 seats had large gaps. Throughout the night I couldn't help sneaking peeks around the curtain and could swear I saw the Ghost of Andre the Giant sadly pacing around in his signature black, one-shoulder unitard. The promoters chose not to paper the venue, so there were no fans sitting in Everest-like climes.

Due to a couple wrong turns on the way up, and a ridiculous hour where we searched in vain for the media-appointed entrance, and a vacant employee who wouldn't let us in once we found it, we missed a large chunk of the undercard. A knowledgeable fellow in press row, Will Strickland, filled us in on what we missed. He said that the best fight up to that point had been a 10-rounder that went the distance between undefeated welter James De La Rosa (now 20-1, 12 KOs) against dangerous journeyman Allen "The Dream Shatterer" Conyers. Usually Conyers either knocks you out or gets knocked out. He'd never gone past five in his eight-year career. This time he lived up to his handle.

By the time we settled in a thick heavy-handed heavyweight, Bermane Stiverne (now 20-1-1, 19 KOs), had entered the ring. Before long he was laying into another big guy with a gaudy record, Kerston Manswell (20-0, 15 going in). Manswell got dropped hard with a series of wide blows at 1:52 of the second.

Next was an intriguing match-up, Vernon Paris against late-replacement, the one and only Emanuel Augustus. The trip was worth it just for this, as Augustus may never fight again or at least put up such a fight. He schooled Parris (23-0, 14 KOs going in) for the last half of the fight. But we all saw this one coming: Paris was given a gift decision by scores of 77-72 twice and

76-73.

Presumably, the inept judges were turned off when Augustus started doing the Drunken Master. The suspiciously bad ref, Gerard White—one of the worst I've ever witnessed—was all over Augustus every time he got into a groove and Paris looked to be in trouble. In spots Augustus was his slippery yet rugged old self, the one who gave Money Mayweather such trouble in 2000. He let his hands go on the inside and outside and pulled stuff out of his bag of tricks that's made him the greatest "Friday Night Fights" fighter of all time.

But he knew how this one would play out, as did any semi-knowledgeable fan or media type. He has since declared retirement and I hope he sticks with it. He is not the same Augustus anymore, even if he presented flashes of old and is still a tough out for anyone that's more pretender than contender. (I happen to think Paris has got skills, mind you. But the way he struggled with the 78-fight veteran causes me to wonder.)

By the time you read this, Bradley-Alexander will have been well-chronicled, with varying opinions as to what degree Bradley was the better man than the more callow Alexander, and how much did Tim's broad dome influence the outcome of the fight. There are also questions as to whether their pricey HBO rematch clause will or should be exerted. (Should a rematch ever be enforced when the initial fight was clearly not great?) Bradley's promoter Gary Shaw is dead set against it, and wants to see WBA titlist Amir Kahn next.

The great irony of travelling great distances to see fights live: all we wanted to do when it was over was get back to the hotel and see the replay on HBO. Since the head butts played a significant role, at least the way Alexander and his team will spin it, we desperately wanted to watch it on TV. The boob tube really is the best seat in the house for catching such details. We had good ringside seats but I didn't have the perfect angle whenever the heads clashed or something potentially dirty happened.

The post-fight presser was an expectedly low-budget affair. There were no microphones or an adequate sound system available, so the various players had to shout over the din of the crowd. It was sad to see Don King, 79, no longer the overwhelming personage we expect him to be. Before the presser began he quietly sat in a chair, seemingly lost in thought or just plain tired and depressed. His wife Henrietta died on December 2. When a fan came up to Don and asked for an autograph or to pose for a picture, he was gracious, always doing so with a smile.

He was the first to speak and held court when Bradley and his team arrived, while his fighter Alexander was still getting stitched up. For five minutes, it was vintage King, full of bombast and malaprops and nonsensical verbal meanderings. The old lion came alive. Most everyone seemed pleased to see it, although the lead promoter Gary Shaw held his head in his hands and massaged his temples.

Shaw was visibly annoyed to have to sit through this, but there's plenty he could learn from his elder. For one thing, The Don knows a thing or two about promoting. Shaw is shameless in this regard. He had the gall, in fact, to brag about the choice of venue when it was his turn to get up and stump for his fighter. "The site justified the fight," he said. I didn't know what that meant

then and still don't now, except that he must not have thought much of the fight…? It didn't turn out to be a great fight, but they had the right idea in putting two great hungry champions in together for a change.

I'm glad I came to Detroit and had this boxing excursion with a good buddy. Glad that I took in all that I had, even the painful and unfortunate bits. After the presser, we wasted no time getting to the Caddie. As we pulled away from the Silverdome, I felt like how an astronaut might upon leaving the moon and heading back to earth, knowing full well he will never be back.

Comment on this article

Brad says:

Ahhhhh....poor Zach and Kenneth didn't feel safe drinking their Grey Goose, eating their Porterhouse steaks and driving their Cadillac in Detroit. I really feel for these tough New Yorkers. LOL. What a shame that the fight wasn't in a more pleasing place.LOL. This could be the lamest post fight piece I've ever read. Zach and Kenneth's 'Dangerous Detroit Adventure.' LOL....how f*cking weak.

brownsugar says:

to be truthfull I have lived in the inner city for many years all over the country and happen to be african american and indian... however I draw the line when it comes to going to detroit inthe winter(on a spontaneous move)... have some good memories,.. but didn't want to risk it. call it stereo typing or raw naked fear.... but I respect these guys.

Radam G says:

I really like the way that copy is weaved. With that said, I was not going to respond. But after a couple of glasses of coconut juice and chompin' on tasty betamax and balut, my katagelophobia took off to get its mad Chinese New Year celebration on and kicking. The most I know about the intercity is being at the boxing gyms, boxing events and passing through it or being chased out. I'm glad that weavers of this piece said it --Mowtown is empty and broke like a mutha -- first, because I hate being accused of hatin.'

Filipinos are entrepreneurs all over the world wherever there is moola to be made. Rats and roaches are everywhere that humans are with food to eat and waste. D-city, motorcity, or whatever city you want to call Detriot, is truly but surely becoming a ghost domain. I'm not surprised a boxing scribe saw "the ghost of Andre The Giant" heavy stepping through the Silverdome. The reasons that the alley cats are gone is because all the rats and roaches and people moved. The alley cats ain't got jack to eat. Ghost food is not doing it for them. The alley cats left on the last Amtrak train steaming out of Mowtown 23 years ago. And in recent years, the motorcity economy has gotten so poor that the only time you would see vary live entrepreneurs -- doing da bad and da good and rats, roaches, strait dogs and alley cats -- were because they were passing through -- quickly passing through. They were not trying to get carjack, ratjack, roachjack, dogjack or alley catjack for not having ghost money -- the new cash

running ghost town [I mean Mowtown], lmfao! Hahahahahahahaha! I'm havin' too much fun. Happy Chinese New Year to all my real players. Holla!

Brad says:

@Brownsugar, give me a break. These frat boys, Zach and Kenneth, weren't "living" in the inner city. They were at the freakin' Book Cadillac Hotel which is about as far from danger and one could get. LOL. 19,000 people drive downtown and go to Red Wings games all winter long in Detroit. I've done it all my life. It's not like a scene from "The Road" like these two frightened frat boys want you to believe. It like driving on any other freeway in any other major city. Boxing is an urban, tough sport. The guys who cover it should reflect that in someway. If you want safe, clean venues...go cover golf. It's really too bad they felt threatened drinking thier Grey Goose and eating their porterhouse steaks and driving their Cadillac. They weren't.

admin says:

I've never been. But those guys aren't pansies. I know Zach can use his fists.....[QUOTE=brownsugar;1956]to be truthfull I have lived in the inner city for many years all over the country and happen to be african american and indian... however I draw the line when it comes to going to detroit inthe winter(on a spontaneous move)... have some good memories,.. but didn't want to risk it. call it stereo typing or raw naked fear.... but I respect these guys.[/QUOTE]

Brad says:

"Zach can you his fists".....on what? A heavybag? In a gym? In a nice safe place? Judging from his over active imagination (Detroit streets are like "The Road" LOL) I think he'd pucker up if confronted with any real danger, which from what I read from the story, he was never in. My God he acted like staying in a downtown Detroit hotel and driving (in a Cadillac) to a fight was some sort of heroic act. Like he was the last out of Saigon. Geeez. As far as Detroit being a "ghost town"....yeah it is. It's freakin' cold out. I was in Chicago a few days ago...it was also a ghost town. It's cold. People don't stay home. Very, very weak stuff. A scared writer beating up on a city which didn't even host the fight!!!! This once great boxing site continues it's alarming regression to mediocrity.

admin says:

I've seen him sparring at Gleasons, sir.....Brad, my good man, it seems like maybe Zach hit a nerve. Or maybe his perceptions just don't match with your reality. Whatev...Don't blow a gasket! If the "regression" is too troubling then maybe you should find another outlet with fare which meets your need. --EM

BoxingLaura says:

I really enjoyed reading this, keep them coming.

brownsugar says:

Brad,.. everybody has the right to their own opinion... While you choose to try make a very juvenile and personal attack against the character of 2 boxing writers you know nothing about based on the type of vehicle they drive. I choose to appreciate their perspective and atmospheric take on what it feels like to be in a desolate place. ....And your poorly mistaken about the cold...Cold weather does play a big part in it... nobody wants to drive on sheets of ice and risk a possible break down in a depleted area like Detroit when you can't be sure when and where your help would come in case of an emergency.... What ever you say,.. you can never take away from the fine effort that went into this well written article.. Everything the authors said was mirrored in the fight... even the fight was desolate.. shabby ring set up. poor staging, inferior props ...it felt like the fight took place in a highschool gymnasium, during a tornado warning. This fight was touted as being a fiscal opportunity for a town that needed a financial come-up.. But what really happened is Shaw and King put together a potential Mega-Fight with a shoe string budget...and not because they didn't have the resources..Kings greed will lead to further loss of his credibility because surely they could have done way better than this...As far as the TSS goes,.. it's not in decline.. it's in transition...that's a good thing.

Radam G says:

Wow! I ain't dat scarrrreeeeed. I know about eight boxers who got murder in and around Mowtown. Holla at Boxrec if you wanna to look 'em up. I will hang out in Knonk's Detroit with Tommy and Ronny Hearns and Eminem in a Mowtown minute. Of course it will be nice to have a police escort and a couple of big uglies -- bodyguards. After all, one must admit that the motorcity is not the Hamptons or Malibu. But I ain't got nuffin' but luv for ya! This once great boxing site continues its rise to out distance all the chump ones. It is now megaGREAT. Recognize! And ask somebodeee in da know. Don't be hatin' because you can't be relatin!' Holla!

the Roast says:

Do we have a new bad guy? Welcome Brad. Maybe we need some smack talk like the old TSS. Maybe the Roast takes a "heel" turn! The Roast and Brad form an Unholy Alliance. We start attacking the other readers, starting with the Reader of the Whoopdedoo Year, Brownsugar. You know what? You suck bro. That's all the trash talk I got right now. I gotta get into this bad guy thing. I'm gonna dye my hair platnum blonde.

Brad says:

ahhhh. Radam G....could you please list the 8 boxers who were murdered in "mowtown?"
Fear sells, and our hard hitting gym rats, Zach and Kenneth, didn't spend the weekend in some war zone. They spent it in a major US city that isn't exactly thriving but also is as far from a "third world country" as you can get. It was a lazy,predictable shot at Detroit. One I'm tired of reading. Guys like Zach and Kenneth come into Detroit, drink, eat, go to sporting events, then drive to neighborhoods nowhere near the Pontiac Silverdome or the Book Cadillac Hotel take picture of boarded up houses and try to convince us that was their experience. It's a lie.

Brad says:

@admin, why would I leave this site because of it's downward regression? I'm a boxing fan from the D. To me it's not "troubling" at all. TSS is simply going in the same direction that Detroit and boxing is....we're all in this thing together. LOL

brownsugar says:

disputes and disagreements come with the territory of free speech, last year all I did was argue,.. now that Floyd Mayweather's gone, one of my favorite past times has gone by the wayside (defending against wave after wave of anti-floyd-fans and pacmaniacs)I couldn't express to you how satifying that was....@Roast.....Hey Roast I got news for ya,... your already a platinum blond and your choice a attire sucks... well,..that didn't sound right..... maybe I need to study under the tutelage of DonPuto69

the Roast says:

Well Sug, I would make fun of your attire but you haven't got the avatar up yet. EM is looking good. Where are the rest of you? If I can figure it out anyone can.

brownsugar says:

your right,.. that was easy. its just a test avatar.... The one I want to use will have to be scanned in.

Radam G says:

@Brad, SURE! I could, but I won't. I don't save and/or slave for anybody. One should always find stuff for himself, especially when and if he is arrogrant. Maybe you can google about the names and how many boxers have been struck down in da D-City. Just sayin' dat I sometimes believe that D stands for Demised/Death/Dead, etc., etc. All respect DUE, but you are the dude who got on your bad tude. FYI, I gave you one source -- Boxrec. I will give you two more -- Fightfax and Boxing-Scoop.Com, the amateur site. Just to name two fighters killed in Mowtown: Ltmid champion Duane Thomas by drug dealers, and DuJuan Johnson during a robbery attempt. Actually it is more than eight pugilists who been killed on the mean streets of the motorcity. I was just talking about the eight who I knew personally. That is my last response on this copy. Holla!

brownsugar says:

actually Roast,.... the subtle platinum, white shoes, blue denim and semi camo looks good on you sort of a pre-autumn thing. I know you are a true fight fan and can rumble when necessary....but your more of a lover than a fighter... I need to consume the flesh of brash fools, and know it alls... to really get into a flaming tirade... anyway... my new avatar is under construction and will be the best fit the approximation of my personality... quiet as it's kept... the new site is going to be more fun than ever.

the Roast says:

Yeah, you right B-Sug we got too much love to have a feud. Leave my white shoes alone. I'm a tennis guy so I go through alot of swoosh. Right now I am playing in the same shoe as Rafa Nadal. Or Rafa is playing in my shoe. I see you got the Floyd 'tar. That's a bold statement. Some people will come after you for that. I know you'll be ready.

brownsugar says:

Lol!!!!!!!!!!!!!!