

Poolside Pugilism at Cosmopolitan Las Vegas

Written by Jim Murphy
Saturday, 30 April 2011 22:02



Nevada's involvement with the sport of boxing dates back more than a century. At a time when prizefighting was illegal in most of the country, Governor Reinhold Sadler signed a bill regulating it into law and the state hosted its first championship bout—James J. Corbett vs. Bob Fitzsimmons—at the Carson City Racetrack in early 1897. In 1960, the city of Las Vegas hosted the first of its many championship fights when welterweights Benny Paret and Don Jordan squared off at the recently opened convention center. Las Vegas has since laid claim to the title 'fight capital of the world' and has seen countless classic fights and championship battles.

Despite this extensive boxing legacy, the 'Silver State' had never before seen anything quite like

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the fight card at the Cosmopolitan Hotel and Casino on Friday, April 29. The second of the casino's series of boxing events was held not in the usual ballroom setting but on the deck of the Cosmo's Boulevard Pool overlooking the Las Vegas strip. The 'poolside' fight card was all business, however, with Carlos Molina defeating Allen Conyers in the main event which was broadcast on ESPN 2's 'Friday Night Fights' (though the broadcast was tape delayed until Saturday due to NFL draft coverage). In the other bout shown on ESPN 2, Hylon Williams Jr. remained undefeated with a lopsided unanimous decision victory over a game but outmatched Marcos Herrera.

It was readily apparent that the setting was the focal point of the event and it made for a slightly bizarre experience watching the fights. In a fight held indoors, all of the crowd energy is focused in a somewhat symmetrical fashion—the ring is in the middle of the venue and the spectators radiate outward in a uniform manner. In the Cosmopolitan's poolside setup, that wasn't the case—there were seats set up around the ring but most of the crowd chose instead to 'circulate' and watch the fights from whatever vantage point they happened to be at. This created a strange dynamic where the boxing didn't really feel like the 'center of attention' but rather just part of 'the show' at a large cocktail party. It was difficult to watch the action closely—let alone try to score it—with all of the activity including socializing fans, the Cosmo's bikini clad cocktail waitresses and an assortment of boxing VIP's.

This isn't to suggest that the crowd was ignorant of or indifferent toward the sport of boxing and the action in the ring; to the contrary it was a very 'boxing savvy' audience that was very appreciative of the fighters and their efforts and well versed in the nuance of 'the sweet science'. They were often distracted, but that's perfectly understandable given the setting amid the sensory overload of the Las Vegas Strip. A purist would complain that it's unfair to the fighters and beneath the dignity of the sport to put them in a situation where they're reduced to the status of caged go-go girls in a nightclub.

Those caveats notwithstanding, the event was very enjoyable and felt like a 'big deal' in a way that a card held in a garden variety convention hall or ballroom does not. The energy was different than the usual boxing vibe, but overall a very positive and upbeat environment for fighters and fans alike. Of particular note was the intimacy and lack of 'social stratification'. At most boxing events the 'rank and file' fans and the VIP's are kept apart but on the Cosmopolitan Pool Deck those barriers didn't exist—fighters, VIPs, high rollers, media and average fight fans intermingled and peacefully coexisted adding to the 'party' atmosphere of the event. Even in Las Vegas, however, the 'house doesn't always win' and the Cosmopolitan was dealt a 'bad hand' in the form of a brutal wind that gusted up to 45 MPH and detracted from an otherwise picture perfect sunny spring afternoon. At the beginning of the card, it was breezy though not unpleasant. Conditions went downhill quickly, and as the sun descended behind the Planet Hollywood tower across the street the wind picked up and it began to get overbearing and slightly chilly. The sight of gale warning flags posted on the replica of Lake Como next door at the Bellagio wouldn't have come as a surprise by that point.

The fighters didn't seem overly fazed by the wind, though it did get involved in the action during the main event. Early in the fight, Carlos Molina was slightly off balance after an exchange and a 40+ MPH gust of wind caught him. He instinctively put his glove to the canvas to steady

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himself, which prompted veteran referee Tony Weeks to rule a knockdown. He seemed to hesitate before making the call, probably trying to figure out if there way a provision in the rules that would allow him to rule that the fighter had been 'blown over'. Since Molina didn't touch his glove to the canvas in reaction to a punch a knockdown might not have been the right call but, then again, it wasn't technically a 'slip' either.

Overall, the Cosmopolitan 'Poolside Boxing' event looks like a winner—especially in the hot summer months to come. Obviously the setting presents a unique challenge for the fighters involved, but on balance it has to be a better experience than fighting before a half full hotel ballroom. It's the sort of event that is great for a serious fight fan but something that a 'boxing newbie' would enjoy as well. Sports are always trying to come up with ways to attract new fans, and events like this are made to order to get casual fans and non-fans hooked on 'the sweet science'. Bikini clad cocktail servers, a sociable crowd of boxing enthusiasts and great fight action in a spectacular setting on a hot summer night in Las Vegas will get them in the door, and some will leave as more devoted fight fans.

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brownsugar says:

Haye has been laying it on thick.... the cutt-off heads,.. tee shirts,... and outlandish threats of a KOing Wlad doesn't really effect me at all.. but being honest,.. I'd have to say that even if Wlad was 20 or 30 pounds lighter he'd still would have still beaten at least 70% of his opponents because of his sound tutelage... Wlad was beautiful dispatching the inactive Samuel Peters,.. but you can't take away from his well schooled approach to the sweet science. In my book Wlad is probably a 65% vs 35% a better opponent given his skill and size... although Haye does possess an equalizing long range torpedo of truth (Charley Sheeen).. Hayes greatest victory will be entering the ring... something most fans feel doubtful about... That alone would permitt me to give Haye the respect due any pugilist who faces his challengers. Just Do it Haye,.. and win or lose,.. continue to hold your head up high.

brownsugar says:

Mortcola,.. may I hear your rebuttle ?