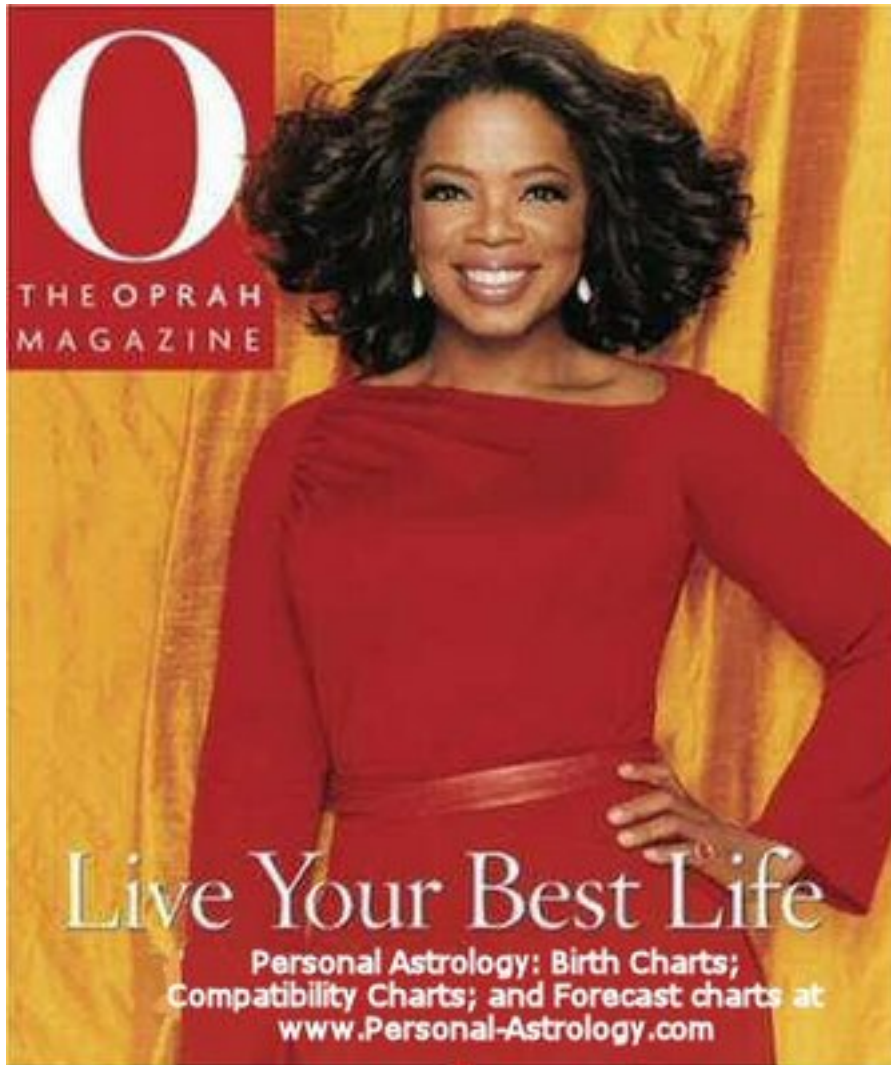


Written by Eric Raskin  
Sunday, 07 August 2011 21:59

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Last week was a busy one for your favorite TSS writers over on ESPN.com, between Editor Mike's feature on bare-knuckle boxing and my column attempting to psychoanalyze Kelly Pavlik in the wake of his controversial withdrawal from a ShoBox fight and the revealing radio interview that followed. I got numerous emails reacting to my piece, and here's one that was fairly representative of what emailers had to say:

Hi Eric,

Great article about Pavlik on ESPN. Almost every article I read about him pulling out was totally vicious and one-sided against him, and then there were one or two exceptions that went the other way and were overly sympathetic to him. Yours was the only one that took an even-handed look at it from both sides. I guess—please pardon the cuss word—most of the writers out there are “asinine.”

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Anyway, I think your theory, that control issues are at the root of his decision, makes more sense than anything else I've heard.

One question about it: Do you think Kelly is right, that Top Rank was just looking to cash him out against Bute? Because it does feel to me like nobody was giving him a chance to win that fight.

Thanks for your time,

Scott

Scott,

Thanks for the kind words. An even-handed analysis was precisely what I was shooting for. Not surprisingly, as a result of me having the audacity to consider both sides, I got accused of being both a Pavlik hater and a Pavlik apologist in the comments section below the article.

Do I think Pavlik is correct about Top Rank, that they were cashing him out against Bute? If the basis for his argument is purely that the fight was going to be in Canada, where Pavlik would need to "put him on a stretcher to win," then it's a weak case; Bute draws huge in the Canada and that's where the fight belongs. At this stage of his career, there's no way Pavlik can still lure 5,000-plus Youngstown fans to Atlantic City. That said, logic tells you there was a certain amount of "cash out" going on. Maybe it was just the ring rust, but Pavlik didn't look anything like an elite fighter in his lone post-rehab bout. "The Ghost" has looked for a couple of years like a guy caught between weight divisions, whereas Bute is peaking at 168 pounds. Pavlik's the one who used the term "cash out" and he never refuted it, never claimed he could beat Bute. That's a red flag. So, yes, I think Pavlik is correct to an extent, that Top Rank wants to get a payday out of him (and for him) while they still can. That's not to say Top Rank wouldn't be thrilled to see him upset Bute. But I agree with Pavlik that his promoters probably weren't optimistic about the likelihood of that happening.

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A final word on Pavlik: People tend to have short memories. I don't believe his withdrawal from this fight with Darryl Cunningham is a career killer. He's still young (29) and he can come back, assuming he has a little something left as a fighter. How many NFL teams showed Terrell Owens the money after he'd proven conclusively that he could destroy a locker room faster than a 350-pound offensive lineman with irritable bowel syndrome? Pavlik has a name, and if he wants another opportunity, he'll get another opportunity. And if he fights well, the fans will forget all about his withdrawal from a fight they didn't care about in the first place.

You know it was a slow week for boxing when a former champ NOT fighting was the central story, but there's still plenty to Rant about, so let's get to it:

- Never mind Editor Mike's ESPN.com article. How about him getting The Oprah to talk to him on Twitter?! (Here's that situation... [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/01/oprah-own-ceo-job-10-time\\_n\\_915436.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/01/oprah-own-ceo-job-10-time_n_915436.html)) That was quite a coup. I can't compete with that. About the best I can hope for is acknowledgement from @MarryLerchant.

- ESPN2's Friday Night Fights delivered once again, with an excellent main event between Vernon Paris and Tim Coleman. And it was made even better by the extreme undersell from color analyst Sergio Mora, who went out of his way to promise a chess match. (In general, I like Mora as a broadcaster, but my one critique is that he sounds too laid back at times. I'm not saying he needs the artificial energy of Gus Johnson, but he could use a little volume boost and little more inflection in his voice. This is boxing, not "Delicious Dish.")

- Some on Twitter criticized Coleman for wearing a Yankees hat during a prefight interview and then an Orioles shirt in the ring. I choose to criticize him just for wearing a Yankees hat, period.

- The only letdown of Paris vs. Coleman: No Roger Mayweather and no Floyd Mayweather Sr.! This is so unexpected, people named Mayweather not showing up for their appointments.

- I recommended this on Twitter, but I'll recommend it here as well: Tim Starks' two-parter on queensberry-rules.com on sanctioning groups and the question of whether the best way to get rid of them is to ignore them altogether. This comes at a time when The Ring Editor-in-Chief Nigel Collins has just begun speaking publicly about not using the alphabet groups' names in print anymore and when maybe, just maybe, HBO and Showtime might be in a position to get

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on board with Ring championships the way ESPN did a decade ago. This mission will never be 100 percent unanimous among journalists. There will always be dissenters who lazily accept the way things are because that's the only reality they've known, or who don't want to get on board with the alternative because they didn't come up with it themselves. But it feels like momentum is building. It's been a slow process and it will continue to be a slow process, but I think if we all work together, the self-serving alphabets can eventually be killed off and boxing fans can return to a world in which we don't say, "Hey, Champ!" and everybody within earshot turns around and answers.

- Congratulations to HBO for landing the Manny Pacquiao-Juan Manuel Marquez III pay-per-view. And congratulations to Bob Arum and Top Rank for a masterfully orchestrated competition that will get this fight the maximum possible exposure. Also, great call by Arum letting Showtime remain the frontrunner for the Antonio Margarito-Miguel Cotto II PPV show, keeping the competition alive and spreading the profits around.
- It was a busy week in terms of PPV undercard news. Now that Erik Morales-Anthony Crolla has been upgraded all the way to Morales-Lucas Matthisse, the September 17 show is very strong from top to bottom. (By the way, I did some research on Crolla for a piece I wrote before the opponent changed twice, and he's not bad at all. But he's no Matthisse.) And the October 15 undercard (Jorge Linares-Antonio DeMarco, Kendall Holt-Danny Garcia) is decent too, considering all parties involved wanted to spend as little money as possible on it.
- Maybe I don't follow amateur boxing closely enough and there's something I'm simply not getting here, but where's the logic in staging the Olympic trials 12 months before the Olympics? Who's to say America's best representatives now will still be our best a year from now? And who's to say they'll even be capable of making the same weight next summer?
- As a Philadelphian, it's my duty to tell you to keep an eye on Jesse Hart, who won the middleweight tourney at the Olympic trials. Hart is the son of Eugene "Cyclone" Hart, a key figure in the 1970s golden age of Philly middleweights who fought all the best 160-pounders of his time and knocked out 28 of the 30 men he defeated.
- As a Philadelphian, it's also my duty to tell you that future Hall of Famer Nigel Collins joined us last week for what turned out to be one of the best episodes of Ring Theory ( <http://ringtheory.podbean.com> ) yet. Nigel provided the inside scoop on how Ross Greenburg muzzled his broadcasters during

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his highly criticized reign at HBO, then Nigel took part in spirited roundtable discussions about Mike Alvarado stripping himself of a belt, what might have been with Muhammad Ali, John Kerry's doppelganger who disqualified Edison Miranda, and the global popularity of women's boxing. And for those fight fans who were specifically waiting to subscribe to Ring Theory until Bill Dettloff whipped out his Ralph Kramden impression, the waiting is over.

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