Written by Eric Raskin
Monday, 19 September 2011 08:34

I hate the alphabet groups in boxing. But I have nothing against the alphabet itself. So, on the heels of my five days and five nights spent experiencing fight week in Las Vegas, this week's column will lean on the alphabet as a narrative-structuring device. I'll offer my insights on the Floyd Mayweather vs. Victor Ortiz hoopla from A to Z, sharing my opinions on the various happenings that the fight world is now buzzing about and going behind the scenes with some of the things I saw, heard, and did that I couldn't have seen, heard, or done from the comfort of my living room:

A is for Action

I'm using "action" to mean two different things here. Primarily, I'm talking about a pay-per-view

card that was as action-packed from top to bottom as any I can remember in recent years. Jessie Vargas vs. Josesito Lopez was the close, hard-fought affair I expected it to be. Erik Morales vs. Pablo Cesar Cano was 10 times the bloody, dramatic battle that anyone expected it to be. Saul Alvarez vs. Alfonso Gomez teased us with the possibility of a massive upset before delivering a sudden (perhaps too sudden) finish. And Mayweather vs. Ortiz, whatever you thought of the conclusion, produced the most memorable action of any Mayweather fight since his first clash with Jose Luis Castillo nine years ago.

But “action” also applies to gambling action, and I got an added kick out of silently rooting for the one outcome nobody else in the arena wanted to see: a draw. At 35-1 odds at the MGM Grand sports book, and with any kind of a fluky technical draw getting me paid, I couldn’t help but plunk down $20 for the opportunity to win $700. Oh, how enjoyable it would have been to pull a Mayweather and tweet a picture of my winning ticket, as well as a picture of me holding a phat stack of seven C-notes. (And perhaps using them as a flip phone on which to call my buddy 50 Cent.) But alas, it wasn’t to be. I need to stick to what I do best: acting like I know what’s going to happen in fights without actually putting any money behind my predictions.

B is for Boos

The boos rained down at the Grand Garden Arena both early and late in Saturday’s card. They echoed when Vargas was given a split decision over Lopez in the opening bout of the pay-per-view. (For the record, I had Lopez winning by a point, but this was no robbery; the fight could have gone either way.) And they reverberated again when Mayweather-Ortiz ended abruptly on a less-than-sporting (but 100-percent legal) two-punch combination that Joe Cortez learned about via the magic of instant replay. On the whole, though, we heard a lot more cheering than booing over the course of this action-packed (callback to the letter A!) night of boxing.

C is for Cano

This wasn’t quite Azumah Nelson announcing his arrival with a competitive loss to a prime Salvador Sanchez, but Cano earned my approval with one hell of a mature, gutsy performance for an untested 21-year-old kid facing a Hall-of-Fame-bound legend. And he bled like the girl scout who tried to sell Larry David cookies this year on Curb Your Enthusiasm. Who would have guessed that Lucas Matthysse dropping out of this show would turn out to be a good thing?

D is for Dynamic

As in, the dynamic prepared-statement reading of Leonard Ellerbe. In the midst of the interminable drone-fest that is the final prefight press conference (we need more guys in suits thanking other guys in suits while the fighters sit there playing with their iPhones!), the CEO of Mayweather Promotions/head sycophant attempted to address the media. I say “attempted” because Ellerbe is to public speaking as Victor Ortiz is to beard growing. I especially enjoyed the moment where Ellerbe built and built toward finally bringing Mayweather to the microphone … only it was Ortiz’s turn to speak next, so Ellerbe had to sheepishly hand it off to Oscar De La Hoya instead so that Oscar could introduce his fighter. Good times.

E is for El Terrible

I've covered the young man, Cano. How about the old man, Morales? Sure, he looked a little closer to shot than he did last time out, against Marcos Maidana. But he added another thriller to a career absolutely loaded with them. Seriously, Arturo Gatti is revered as the most exciting fighter of his generation, but Morales' resume of major and minor classics is creeping up on Gatti's. The guy is simply never in a bad fight, never escapes one without his face looking like it's gone through a food processor, and even if watching him fight now means watching his love handles jiggle round after round, that's a small price to pay. It truly was an honor to be there live to see the legendary El Terrible do his thing.

F is for Free Food

As a guy who does a lot of one-day trips to Atlantic City for fights and rarely does these five-day trips to Vegas, most of my media feeding experience involves the college-cafeteria-quality media room buffet at Boardwalk Hall. I wasn't fully prepared for the majesty of media food in Vegas—with the highlight coming at a Thursday night media dinner at a restaurant called Fiamma, a smorgasbord of fine foods the likes of which I don't quite experience at home when finishing my kids' partially eaten peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Golden Boy isn't sending me any freelance checks anymore, so I may as well at least let them foot the bill for some grub. Speaking of which …

G is for Golden Boy Promotions

As pretty much everyone knows by now, GBP recently gutted the staff of The Ring magazine, firing people who did the job with passion and integrity and expertise in magazine production in favor of … well, other people. I'm not happy about this. I got mildly nauseous at the prefight press conference, watching Richard Schaefer and De La Hoya greet each other on the dais with a big ol' back-slappy hug. And the nausea just kept bubbling to the surface all week long. Look, there are plenty of employees of Golden Boy against whom I harbor no ill will. But the people who played a hand in the firing of people I respect and care about—while potentially destroying the magazine I've spent my entire career proudly representing—made the bile rise inside me throughout the week. I took the most professional path I could: not saying a word to any of them, since I didn't have anything nice to say.

H is for HBO.com

Editor Steve Marzolf and company are the ones who brought me out to Vegas for the week so I could author the HBO.com blog, and it was a pleasure working with them. In case you missed any of it, you can check out my work for them here http://www.insidehboboxing.com/ , and I particularly recommend my fun back-and-forth discussion with fellow scribe Kieran Mulvaney (http://tinyurl.com/3ej6q4j) and my three seconds of fame in this video (http://tinyurl.com/3ep6c8n). Okay, end of commercial interruption, back to our regularly scheduled column …

I is for Indoors

Would you believe I only left the MGM Grand once in the entire five days I was there? I walked 10 minutes to Planet Hollywood on Friday to meet a friend and former business associate for lunch, and otherwise, I breathed recycled casino air for roughly 154 consecutive hours. I guess when I call this column the “Vegas experience,” I should really call it the “MGM Grand experience.” I didn’t actually experience Vegas at all. But I’ve experienced Vegas plenty of times before, so this trip was about ease, convenience, and getting work done. And that meant never seeing the sun. My sources tell me the weather was rather nice.

J is for Jones

In the best undercard fight you didn’t see from the comfort of your home, frequent ESPN2 and ShoBox competitor Carson Jones scored a mild upset of the generally overrated Said Ouali, closing his right eye and forcing his corner to stop the fight after the seventh round. At various points in the fight. I had flashbacks to the first time I saw Ouali fight in person, when he was boxing well before falling apart in the fifth round against the then-unknown Kermit Cintron. When Ouali’s corner threw in the towel on Saturday night, Jones turned toward the crowd, thrust both arms in the air, and yelled, “Yes!” (And because the arena was 96 percent empty throughout the undercard, I was able to hear his voice clearly from seven rows back in the press section.) It was a great moment of triumph for a journeyman fighter still looking to make something of himself, and hopefully he’ll get a TV date out of this entertaining win.

K is for Kyrone Butler

In a far less compelling undercard fight between two guys making their pro debuts, Butler scored a four-round shutout over … wait for it … Cassius Clay. I flew to Vegas to see Cassius Clay handed his first professional loss. I feel like I’m a part of history now.

L is for Larry Merchant

We couldn’t hear it in the arena, but you’d better believe I watched it on YouTube later that night, when HBO’s feisty old color man screamed at Mayweather, “I wish I was 50 years younger and I’d kick your ass!” Some have suggested Merchant went over the line. In my view, sure, it was unprofessional, but it was completely warranted. When Mayweather said Merchant needed to be fired, that’s the kind of threatening statement that causes a man with a backbone to stand up for himself. So Larry did. And it gave us this (http://bit.ly/n5fueo). Everybody wins.

M is for Money Mayweather

Ortiz is a lover. Mayweather is a fighter. He operated within the rules when he decked an opponent who failed to protect himself while the fight was going on, and even if many other fighters wouldn’t have taken advantage of that opening the way Mayweather did, there is no real fault to be found in his actions. And for four rounds leading up to the controversial finish, Floyd was his usual brilliant self. Maybe his resume isn’t as great as he thinks it is. Maybe he’s overrating his place in history. But the man is one heck of a special talent. And the fact that he

found a way to both win and perpetuate his bad-guy image means demand for a Pacquiao-Mayweather fight won't cool off one bit. Now it's up to Mayweather to capitalize on that sometime before both fighters are in their 40s.

(Check back tomorrow for Part II, as we go from N to Z. Admit it, you're dying to see what liberties I take with the rules in order to use the letter X.)

Eric Raskin can be contacted at RaskinBoxing@yahoo.com. You can follow him on Twitter @EricRaskin and listen to new episodes of his podcast, Ring Theory, at http://ringtheory.podbean.com

.