Written by Eric Raskin
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Between the new fall season of television, baseball playoff games that last into the wee hours, NFL football in full swing, seven hours of televised boxing over the weekend, and this whole child-rearing thing I'm supposed to be doing, my leisure-time schedule is getting awfully tight. So to cut corners, I'm keeping this intro short. I might even remove one letter from Darren Barker's last name to save time. Let's get right to this week's reader email:

Hi Eric,

I know you're a fan of Max Kellerman and his Face Off show, and so am I … but you have to admit, the show totally jumped the shark tonight. That s--- with Pacquiao and Marquez sitting in front of a giant movie screen, with Kellerman making them diagram plays together, I dunno, man, none of it worked. That was HBO's worst prefight hype attempt since Calzaghe-Jones 24/7. What did you think?

Love the columns and the rants,
Brad

Hi Brad,

On the one hand, I want to give the creative forces behind Face Off credit for knowing they needed to do something different. Neither Pacquiao nor Marquez speaks English well enough to ever say anything particularly interesting. The two fighters have no hatred for one another and aren't the types to pretend to hate each other for the benefit of the TV cameras. The producers recognized this, so they invited the trainers to sit in and built the whole thing around having the fighters watch the highlights of their first two fights together. So let's give everyone a golf clap for trying. Imagine how dreadful the show would have been with just Max, Manny, Juan Manuel, and three steel chairs.

All that said, you're right. None of the creative twists really worked. Freddie Roach didn't have much of anything to say, and Nacho Beristain speaks even less English than his fighter. The idea of showing highlight clips was fine—you'll never be bored watching replays of these two guys punching each other—but posing them in their stances and breaking down strategies came off more awkward than effective. Through no particular fault of anyone, this was the worst Face Off so far.

But it doesn't mean the show has "jumped the shark." When something actually jumps the shark, there's no going back. This was just one subpar episode, and the show will recover. How do I know this? Because Kellerman tweeted "Oh. My. God." in reference to the next installment, featuring Miguel Cotto and Antonio Margarito. And Kellerman doesn't lie about these things. He told us in advance that Bernard Hopkins-Jean Pascal and Wladimir Klitschko-David Haye were fantastic and, importantly, he didn't tell us the same about Floyd Mayweather-Victor Ortiz or Pacquiao-Marquez. So I'm confident that Face Off will bounce back next episode.

And I get the feeling the emotional intensity between Margarito and Cotto is going to render the fact that they need a translator irrelevant.

Okay, time for the Rants. Or, as Michael Buffer and his contempt for the letter "r" might say, time for the Ants:

--Here's an outside-the-box idea for a future Face Off: Mayweather vs. Hopkins, debating which of them is the greatest American fighter of their era. Tell me that wouldn't make for spectacular television.

--My favorite moment of the Sergio Martinez-Darren Barker fight: In the seventh round, as everyone else at the broadcast table was piling on Martinez and his mediocre performance, Larry Merchant interrupted the onslaught to give Barker credit for causing Martinez problems. Merchant can't kick Floyd Mayweather's ass at age 80, but he can still bring much-needed balance to a broadcast.

--On a related note, who would have guessed Martinez-Barker would be a more entertaining and competitive fight than Andy Lee-Brian Vera? It's a strange thing to say, but the main event stole the show on Saturday night.

--You know that reputation Emanuel Steward has had for years as an aggressive, knockout-minded trainer? Given the way Lee fought against Vera, in combination with the safety-oriented styles Wlad Klitschko and Lennox Lewis mastered under Steward's tutelage, I'm going to go ahead and declare the reputation undeserved at this point. (And I'm not criticizing Steward or Lee at all, mind you. Lee fought the perfect style to avenge his loss to Vera, and that's to his credit. I'm just saying the trainer's rep has outlasted the reality behind it.)

--I'm not quite sure why Hopkins was described on the screen Saturday night as "light heavyweight titleholder." If a guy is actually the champion of the world, you may as well acknowledge it.

--If I kept a personal pound-for-pound list, I'd be putting Roman "Chocolatito" Gonzalez in my top 20 now. In fact, I know this will rankle a few of the fight geeks, but I think the current Chocolatito beats any version of Ivan Calderon.

--I agree with Carlos Acevedo of TheCruelestSport.com, an ugly fight against an old Joel Casamayor is no way to market Timothy Bradley as a future Pacquiao opponent on the Pacquiao-Marquez III undercard. And Bob Arum and his matchmakers are no dummies, which is why I'm not ruling out a last-minute opponent switch to a face-first clubfighter.

--Note to self: Don't date any of the same women as Matt Remillard.

--It's safe to say you'll never see a better fight with a 120-106 scorecard than Olusegun Ajose vs. Ali Cheebah.

--So Floyd Mayweather doesn't just park in handicapped spots, he "pig parks" in two of them at once. Once again, we see that life imitates Curb Your Enthusiasm—kind of like that time Mike Buffer was paying tribute to someone before the ceremonial 10-count and misread "beloved aunt."

--Check out a loaded episode of Ring Theory (http://ringtheory.podbean.com) this week, featuring a guest appearance from none other than the world light heavyweight champion (not titleholder), Bernard Hopkins. Here's hoping Bill Dettloff and I are able to get more than one question in.

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