

Written by Eric Raskin

Monday, 10 October 2011 06:49



We've reached the point where unless Wlad announces that he is fighting Vitali, the boxing world responds with a yawn.

For those readers who are tired of me referencing the Philadelphia sports scene in my boxing column, good news: You'll be getting a reprieve until April. The Phillies' season ended in disaster on Friday, the Eagles' season effectively ended on Sunday (although you could argue that it was killed, just like the previous 12 seasons, back when Andy Reid was first hired in 1999), and I lost the patience to follow regular-season hockey about 10 years ago. So I have no emotional investment in any professional sports for the next six months.

Boxing's detractors can detract all they want, but it's a sport that gives its fans something to look forward to almost every single week of the year, and you don't have to worry about "your team" being in the playoff hunt to keep you interested. Even in a slow week like the one that just

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concluded, there's still enough going on to warrant some Rants. But before we get to those, I'll answer two quick emails following up on a couple of topics left over from last week.

Eric,

The Marquez-Pacquiao Face Off was just horrible, but considering how the fights of some of the good ones they did turned out—Hopkins-Pascal, Klitschko-Haye, Mayweather-Ortiz—this might actually be a good omen.

—Steve The Greek

Steve,

You know I love you (to the extent that a boxing writer can love a mailbag contributor), but I disagree with you on a couple of fronts here. First, I wouldn't say the Pacquiao-Marquez Face Off was "horrible"; it was the worst in the series so far, but it was by no means an unwatchable 12 minutes of television.

Second, I thought Hopkins-Pascal II and Mayweather-Ortiz were both entertaining fights. Neither one was a Fight of the Year candidate, of course. But Hopkins-Pascal featured pockets of excellent action, the stirring intrigue of Hopkins chasing history, and, of course, The Push-Ups. And Mayweather-Ortiz was the most memorable fight Mayweather has been in since rising above lightweight, it ended with a contender for Knockout of the Year, and it gave us Larry Merchant's "I wish I was 50 years younger" moment.

I'll grant you Klitschko vs. Haye. That was a very good Face Off and a fairly abysmal fight. But otherwise, I don't see anything to suggest the quality of the fight is inversely proportional to the quality of the Face Off.

Hi Ya Eric,

What's the deal with the boxing press jumping all over Sergio Martinez for not blasting out Darren Barker in a couple of rounds and instead of saying what a good fight it was and how well Barker fought, they have jumped all over Martinez? What gives? He fought through a broken nose and a tough, skilled opponent to kayo him in the championship rounds, what's wrong with that? Some people are just never satisfied, I guess. And a perfect example of what's wrong with boxing, Tony Thompson-Eddie Chambers gets a Showtime date while Marquez-Concepcion II doesn't. That's just wrong on so many levels.

Cheers,
Nicholas

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Nicholas,

Good to hear from another one of my regular mailbag pals. And unlike my buddy Steve The Greek, I think your observations are pretty well on point. Martinez wasn't at his best, but that was partially because Barker turned out not to be Gary Lockett 2.0. Barker proved himself worthy of a top-10 middleweight ranking. And Martinez showed that even on an off-night, he can still get the job done inside the distance. He took heat anyway, and that's precisely the problem with a star fighter facing a relative unknown: You take heat if you struggle against him, whereas if you blow him out like you're expected to, you take heat for facing a bum. In my opinion, Martinez deserves no heat right now.

As for your point about which fight gets a Showtime date, I feel your frustration, but you can't blame Showtime at all. Marquez-Concepcion II is in Mexico and is scheduled for the same date on which the Super Six finals were supposed to occur. It wouldn't have made any sense for the network to make a play for that fight, as spectacular as the first Marquez-Concepcion bout was. And Chambers-Thompson doesn't excite anyone, but at least it's an even fight on paper. I don't have a problem with them spending a few ShoBox shekels on that one. I just reserve the right to watch it the following morning on DVR and get my fast-forwarding finger ready, then be prepared to fire up Marquez-Concepcion on YouTube the next morning.

Okay, let's shift the focus from last week's news to this week's with some Rants:

--So, which just-announced heavyweight fight has you less excited: Kimbo Slice vs. Tay Bledsoe or Wladimir Klitschko vs. Jean-Marc Mormeck? In announcing the latter fight on his website, Klitschko said, "Mormeck is one of the most experienced fighters I have ever faced." If that's the best you can do to hype a fight, it's probably a fight that can not be hyped. (For what it's worth, Bledsoe is the most experienced opponent Slice has ever faced in the boxing ring. We'll see if Kimbo uses that fact to try to sell the fight.)

--I understand that boxers are instructed to always raise their hands as the scorecards are being read, so that they don't appear surprised if they get a close decision and so that they can claim robbery if they don't get it. Still, Raul Martinez needs to work a little common sense into the equation. When his fight on Saturday against Rodrigo Guerrero went to a technical decision after six rounds, and the fight featured Martinez suffering a hard knockdown in the third round, once a 59-54 scorecard was read, it was time to stop pretending he thought the decision was going his way. And, no, I'm not accepting six rounds of getting hit in the head as an excuse for Martinez's mind not be perfectly attuned to the mathematics of the situation.

--Hey, Sharif Bogere, what's with all the postfight crying? Even Acelino Freitas was calling you a bitch as he watched that.

--No matter how busy you are, this video of all of the Ring magazine Knockout of the Year winners from 1989-2010 is well worth 15 minutes of your time: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g4DiqpQ2HxE>. (Credit to Tim Starks on the Queensberry Rules blog for bringing this gem to my attention.)

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--I wasn't affected one way or the other by the news of Al Davis' death over the weekend. I was, however, deeply traumatized by ESPN replaying Ice Cube's horrible Raiders/rap documentary as a result.

--ESPN The Magazine's "Body Issue" defines Sergio Martinez not as "middleweight champion of the world" or "lineal middleweight champ," but as "WBC Diamond middleweight champ." Here I was thinking Martinez was the one true middleweight king, but I guess I shouldn't recognize him as such until he's unified with the sapphire champ and the aquamarine titleholder.

--I have an entire column later this week devoted to my opinion on a particular fighter's International Boxing Hall of Fame candidacy, but here's my quick take on some of the non-participants on the ballot for the first time: I think Al Bernstein deserves to go into the Hall immediately (and not just because he's made two fantastic guest appearances on Ring Theory, although that doesn't hurt); Freddie Roach will definitely go in eventually but this feels a couple of years too soon to me, as he's still somewhat of an ascendant star; and though I mock him with regularity, Michael Buffer certainly belongs in there if any ring announcer does.

--The good news about Kell Brook taking care of business against Rafal Jackiewicz so spectacularly: There's a new player in the welterweight division. The bad news about it: Manny Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather each just added a name to the list of opponents they can face instead of facing each other.

--If you've ever said to yourself, "Why don't more interviewers ask Bernard Hopkins about his wife's marital-aid collection?" then you'll want to check out the latest episode of Ring Theory (<http://ringtheory.podbean.com>), on which B-Hop joined me and Bill Dettloff to discuss Chad Dawson, Jean Pascal, and, apparently, some less conventional topics. Also, keep an eye out later this week for a special Grantland Network edition of Ring Theory, on which Bill and I will provide our own in-depth analysis of Mrs. Hopkins' marital-aid collection and speculate on how it would fare in a matchup with Chad Dawson's wife's battery-operated friends.

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