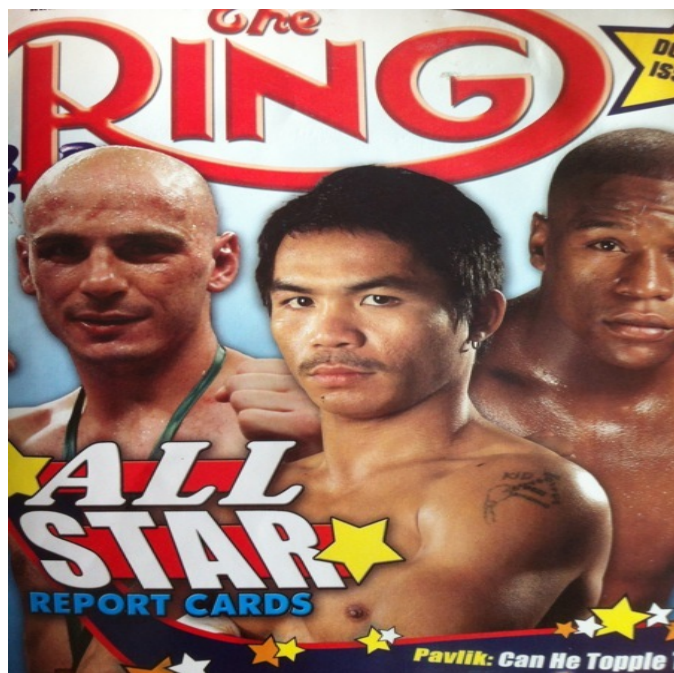


Atlas, Steward and Goldsticker On How To Fix USA Boxing

Written by Michael Woods

Wednesday, 22 August 2012 15:34



Teddy Atlas has never met an opinion he won't offer. It is in his fiber to keep it real, and tell it like it is, and if feathers get ruffled, well, tough tamales. The ESPN analyst offered up some suggestions and critiques about USA Boxing after the Games ended in London, with the lone bright spots coming on the women's side, with Claressa Shields' gold and Marlen Esparza's bronze.

First off, Atlas said in the future, he'd like to have desire and attitude factored in more when choosing a team. "I'd rather have guys less that are less athletic and care more about representing us and the opportunity, taking it as an honor," he said a few days after coming back from his three week stay in London.

"We have to re-think the whole system," he said. That starts with some Romney-style management decisions. "The first thing is, there have to be a lot of pink slips," he said, with an eye on the USA Boxing brain trust. "It's badly organized, badly run, just like AIBA (International Amateur Boxing Association, which oversaw the London tourney, and has been accused of corruption)."

Here's a quickie refresher on the banana-peel laden path to the London Games...

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Choosing a coach a month before the Games, as was done when Basheer Abdullah was inserted after Joe Zanders was yanked from his position before the Games, just a few months after replacing Dan Campbell, who oversaw the 2008 squad, which also stank the joint out, certainly didn't help matters. You'll recall the 2008 squad was in rampant disarray, with fighters in a constant state of mutiny. As Gary Russell Sr. put it to Mitch Abramson of the NY Daily News after the Beijing Games, "(Campbell) had so many arguments with these boxers it's like he's setting them all up for failure. He's threatened to throw Sadam (Ali), Demetrius, Rau'Shee (Warren), Javier (Molina), Gary Russel Jr. and Luis all off the team. That's six boxers, more than half the team. Something has to be wrong if you're threatening to get rid of half the team. It can't all be the fault of the boxers." Campbell "retired" a bit after Beijing, and one had to think that things could only get better. Joe Zanders was hired as the US national coach in January 2011, one might say an awful long time to go without a head of the program following the Campbell departure. But then there was reason for optimism; we heard that personal coaches would get more input with the kids, and that Freddie Roach would come in and lend a hand. Zanders got the official title of head coach for London in August 2011, and publicly, things seemed to be OK. He and Roach seemingly--seemingly-- co-existed nicely. But in mid March, word came that Zanders was out after the USA showing at the 2011 worlds--a lone bronze for the Stars and Strippers-- didn't impress the United States Olympic Committee (USOC). Or, "promoted," as the release put it, in yet another example of the goofy workings of USA Boxing. The Roach experiment went awry with whispers that Zanders didn't care for Freddie's presence all that much. And the release of tape of Roach labeling super heavyweight Michael Hunter as "lazy" further poisoned the waters. Basheer Adullah, who coached the 2004 squad, was named head coach on June 27, a scant month before the games kicked off. Things went goofy again a few days before the first bout, when it was learned that Abdullah couldn't coach ringside, because he'd been involved with pros too recently. This shouldn't have been a WTH moment for USA Boxing officials making such decisions, as it wasn't some obscure rule added to the rulebook at the 11th hour, under darkness. So, with Adullah yelling instructions away from ringside, and personal coaches using bullhorns to yell instructions to fighters from rows back in the arena, the fighters got fighting, and you know how that turned out.

Atlas would like the coach to be picked a good spell in advance, so that guy can help carve out a system, and see the athletes at tourneys, and trials. Whether that occurs is up to the gang that runs USA Boxing; Anthony Bartkowski is the director. As for a head coach, Atlas is more than open to a foreigner taking over the reigns. A Cuban would be stellar, as they've had success with the points system in place. Brit Terry Edwards in fact was rumored to have the job before it landed in Abdullah's lap, so it seems that possibility is in play.

Another thing we might see if Atlas had his druthers. The Staten Islander likes what the NFL does, using the intelligence and problem solving test, the Wonderlic Test, to weed out problems before the draft.

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Hey, what about you, Teddy? Would Atlas take the reins, and coach the squad in Brazil in 2016, if asked?

"They'd have to fire people first," he said. "I wouldn't do it like Freddie Roach, show up and have it be like a photo opp. I'd want to do something if I could make a difference."

One man who has tasted extreme success in the pro ranks, and thought he could help resurrect the Team USA fortunes is Emanuel Steward. The trainer-manager-TV analyst-promoter chatted with TSS about how to address our medal drought.

Steward agreed that the correct word is "disaster" when evaluating the showing by the men in London. Steward, who acted as national director of coaching for USA Boxing heading into the 2004 Olympics in Greece, has become so disenchanted with the American amateur muddle, that he admitted he basically knows almost nothing about any of the fighters who comprised the team. "Now I didn't even know who was on the team," he admitted to me.

"The whole program fell part," he told me. "The last team of note was maybe 1988," he said, allowing that the rare diamond like Andre Ward, in 2004, still occasionally shines through the gloom.

Steward said the US used to produce superb athletes in track and field, and boxing, but no more. The question begs...why?

Start with the lack of international competition, Steward said. back in 1974, 1975, heading toward the Games in Montreal, boxers who were a lock for the US squad were fighting frequently in tournaments pitting USA vs Cuba, and Poland and Germany, Steward said. "And by the time the Olympics came, they were already household names," he said, noting that the tourneys also gave the fighters ample seasoning, something this squad lacked bigtime. "I'm a manager, and I've never heard of these guys," he said. "Get them on TV!"

Ray Leonard and Leon Spinks lost at overseas tourneys, and learned how to bounce back, he said. Also, the judges working those shows, some of whom would work in the Olympics, became familiar, in a good way, with the boxers.

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The way the world looks at America doesn't help matters, the Kronk sage stated. "We've created so many enemies," he said. "They look at America as the rich, spoiled brat. They don't believe that the team has little funding, that there's no money in the amateur program." Thus, the Hall of Famer implied, it is not mere sour grapes when we hear analysts complain that judges are screwing over Americans during Olympic bouts. It is payback time, to a degree, for the policies and attitude of our nation, in the geo-political arena. America is seen as somewhat of a bully that needs a takedown; but also, many folks still aspire to make it here, so they look up to our fighters, and raise their games that much more to impress watchers. If I beat the American, they tend to think, that is a meaningful victory.

Julie Goldsticker, who ran the media relations for the team, and has done work for USA Boxing since 2001, is quite likely the single best source if you are looking for the one person who has seen what the program has done right, and wrong, in the last decade. So I asked for her input on how to tweak USA Boxing, so we start getting the medal count, and turning out the sort of fighters most think America is capable of turning out.

"Everyone wants one answer," she told me. "They wonder why we didn't succeed, they probably need more international experience, and more time with the coaches in their corner, and other stuff, there isn't one easy fix."

Budget cuts, by the USOC, certainly had a huge effect on the team, she agreed. The budget for USA Boxing was cut after the last Games, because of a poor medal count, and the fear is that trend will continue. Less than \$500,000 for a year, to pay salaries, and fund travel to tournaments overseas, so the kids can get seasoning, doesn't cut it. Goldsticker would love to see some of the alumni step up, and open up their checkbook, to fill the vacuum.

"Oscar de la Hoya had a lot to say during the Games," she noted. "We've reached out to him a lot, and if it's money, or time, if he just wants to give his time, we'd love the help. If Oscar wanted to fund an international event, he could." Goldsticker, who does PR work for Andre Ward, says Ward has done his part giving back to USA Boxing.

She said that picking a coach early is on the radar of USA Boxing, so hopefully, the continuity issue will be attended to, so we aren't repeating this same column, or, at least, that same element of the column, after Brazil.

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For those hoping, as I do, that personal coaches, guys who have been working with fighters for five, seven or more years, will get to travel to the Olympics, and work the corners of the fighters...sorry. Goldsticker says that there are only so many credentials to go round, that it would be too unwieldy to allow a personal coach for every person on the team. Thus, she said, it is super important for personal coaches to get onboard with the system devised by the national team head.

Readers, feel free to pitch in with your ideas. After all, this is the Team USA we are talking about. It is "your" team, they represent you as a nation. If you have some ideas on how to get things moving in the right direction; I will collect them, and present them down the line to someone at USA Boxing, and see if we can't collectively help get us to where we want to be, where we can be, where we should be.

[Comment on this article](#)

Radam G says:

Wow! On fixing USA boxing, you need to start deep with fixing bad behavior, conservatism, stereotyping and politics. I'm reminded of great boxing coach Joe Cloud, who now lives in the Philippines. Why was he never given his opportunities as U.S. Olympic boxing coach?

Those in da know know da deal and what I know. Now this is the type of bullshyt that has to stop to get the USA back on the track of Olympic boxing greatness. Holla!

Radam G says:

BTW, every country that Joe Clough have coached in Asia improved in the A-Games and O-Games. Thailand, Mumbai [India], Malaysia and the Philippines, just throw out a few names. Holla!

Radam G says:

JC is da man wif da plan. Making any country tops, he CAN! Wake da double fudge up, USA! Quit dumping ___ ___ ___ on your on. It ain't okay. We live in a new day. You are going down the wrong trail "On How To Fix USA Boxing," you know da way!

CALL Joe Clough. Dude is your savior against boxing O-Games straight-up stanky sorry performance for the lame-arse male team. They've lost their cojones. And all of 'em are a bunch of phonies. Hahaha! Holla!