Written by Michael Woods
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I am always surprised, sadly, whenever I see any treatment of boxing in the media that is positive.

We hear a constant drumbeat of negativity, about the matches that don't get made, about the diminishment of the popularity of the sport, about the ludicrous preponderance of title belts..and I am not immune from criticism in this realm. But it strikes me that if all of us involved in the game spent more time looking for the positives, and trying to remedy the negatives, the sport would be better served.

With all that in mind, I was curious to see what author Alexandre Choko, a 38 year-old Montreal resident, would bring to the table with his new book, "The Future of Boxing." Seeing as how the XL document weighs in at around eight pounds or so, that hinted to me that Choko does indeed see a future for a sport that struggles with perceptions of imminent obsolescence.

I can report that Choko's work indicates that he holds the sweet science in high regard, and 324-page work of art--yes, the photography, the layout, the fact that he spoke to 55 fighters of renown lifts the book to that level--traffics almost purely in the upsides of the sport.

Choko, in a phone interview, told me he started the book in 2004. It reads like a labor of love, and Choko confirmed that to me. A former amateur boxer and kickboxer who owned and ran a gym, he didn't have easy access to the boldface names he eventually tracked down for interviews, so Choko hooked up with the International Boxing Hall of Fame, and that entity facilitated about two interviews or so a month, starting in 2007. Choko browsed hundreds of thousands of images to snag the best images for the book, and reports that as opposed to hitting the finish line feeling fatigued, depressed abou the sports' well-being, he sees great promise for boxing looking to the future. He knew as much entering the project, he said. "To get into ring it takes a certain kind of individual," he said. "It's not for everybody. I'm saddened to think some people cannot recognize that boxing can be beneficial, that it can take kids off the streets. Boxing could be beneficial to kids, get to them before they end up in streets. There was no doubt in my mind that boxing had a future."

The reader probably benefits from the fact that Choko didn't enter the project with a cynical mindset. He retains a gee-whiz appreciation that he was able to land interviews with past and present Hall of Famers and notables, like George Foreman, Nonito Donaire, Jeff Fenech, Henry Cooper, Mikkel Kessler, Nino Benvenuti and Ricardo Lopez, who are some of the pugs who most strongly affected Choko with their insights and recollections. "The core of the book is the legends who were kind enough to talk about the sport, its past, present and future," he said. I enjoyed tidbits like this one from Benevenuti: "The best punch, for me, is the one that arrives first!"

Some of the anecdotes are today particularly poignant. Hector Camacho admits to Choko that he had a pal give him clean urine so he could pass a drug test for a 1995 fight at Foxwoods in Connecticut. "I've always been kind of a bad boy," Camacho tells Choko.

Anyone, fight fan or no, can appreciate Angelo Dundee's advice that, "You just gotta keep hustling!"

Fighters, especially ones not as blessed with an over-abundance of natural talent, will

appreciate this takeaway from Ray "Boom Boom" Mancini: "Talent, character, intestinal fortitude, a big heart and a good chin--that's always going to win out over no matter what style it's up against."

Choko wasn't interested in being a see-no-evil cheerleader for the sport.

"I do see the dark side as well, being a gym owner gave me perspective," he told me. "I saw more hurt in the gym than in fights and sometimes the damage is not reported because of the system, because the boxer gets his purse only if he fights."

Does Choko, when considering the future of the sport, ever ponder its present, ever ask himself if it should exist? Does he ever watch a back and forth war, and wonder if such a spectatcle of savagery and brutality should exist in a "civilized" society? "In boxing, almost never, when I watch UFC, I wonder why the heck this guy on the floor being pounded by elbows," he said. "It is brutal talking an elbow or a knee."

He's hoping that a good number of you will purchase the book, for yourselves or to wrap and tuck under the tree for a fellow fight lovers, this and in future holiday seasons. "Peter Heller wrote a book, "In This Corner...!" it was published in 1973, he spoke to 42 world champs. I didn't reinvent the wheel...that book still has a life, and is an inspiration for me. Hopefully, these stories will be timeless."

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