

## Don Elbaum and The Great American Heavyweight Box-Off

Written by Thomas Hauser  
Friday, 18 January 2013 10:45

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*(L-R) Devin Vargas, Jason Estrada, Daniel Martz, Joey Abell and Alonzo Butler*

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When one thinks of Don Elbaum, other famous Dons come to mind.

Don Juan, for example. Now that Paul Newman is gone, Elbaum is the primary object of desire for a generation of older women. Word is that Sophia Loren is dying to meet him.

The previous paragraph is false.

Elbaum also draws comparisons with Don Quixote, since he's perpetually tilting at windmills. Given Elbaum's penchant in that regard, I went to the kitchen for a grain of salt when the following press release arrived in my email inbox on January 9th.

“THE GREAT AMERICAN HEAVYWEIGHT BOX-OFF: Veteran promoter-matchmaker Don Elbaum will host a press conference Wednesday, January 16, at the world famous Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn to make a major announcement regarding the creation of The Great America Heavyweight Box-Off (TGAHBO). The tournament will launch in early 2013. Elbaum will reveal details of the tournament purse structure as well as projected dates, venues, and other pertinent information. The eight participating American heavyweights plus one reserve in case of injury will be announced and most will be in attendance. Food and beverages will be served.”

The food and beverages were supplied by Rafael Torres of Baked in Brooklyn. The sandwiches and salads were very good. The chocolate chip cookies were exquisite.

As for The Great American Heavyweight Box-Off (TGAHBO), here goes.

Decades ago, Elbaum promoted a heavyweight from Syracuse named Greg Sorrentino, who compiled a 19-and-9 record with 2 knockouts and 6 KOs by before retiring in 1983. Elbaum says that Sorrentino is “as sharp as they come. He's like a razor blade,” Don notes. “That's a new razor blade, not a used one.”

Sorrentino has some money now and says, “America should be ashamed of itself for not having

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a heavyweight champ.”

Elbaum concurs, proclaiming, “This tournament is a patriotic venture to put American heavyweights back in the spotlight. It’s what boxing needs to be great again.”

Back to Sorrentino: “Any fighter who fights for the championship is just one punch away from winning it. Whoever wins this tournament is going after the Klitschkos.”

Elbaum and Sorrentino are co-promoting TGAHBO. The tournament (according to Don) is slated to launch in April with eight fighters and will be spread out over three dates. The first date will have four ten-round fights with the winner of each fight getting \$25,000 and the loser \$15,000. The winner of each semi-final bout will receive \$50,000 and the loser \$25,000. The final fight will be twelve rounds with \$250,000 to the winner and \$50,000 for the loser. But the winner will be required to give \$25,000 of his purse to a legitimate charity. Elbaum and Sorrentino have longterm promotional options on each of the participants.

Six of the eight tournament fighters were at Gleason’s for the kick-off press conference. The final two entrants have yet to be chosen.

Who are the first six?

The cream of the crop – and it’s heavy cream – is 32-year-old Jason Estrada. Estrada is a chronically-overweight 2004 US Olympian who has fought at weights ranging from 237 to 257 pounds. His record is 20 wins (with 6 KOs) and 4 losses (1 KO by). Elbaum says, “Jason is like a 250-pound Willie Pep. There’s incredible talent there. He doesn’t always put out in the ring, but he can fight when he wants to.”

Devin Vargas, age 31, is another 2004 US Olympian. Vargas has been knocked out in two of his last three fights and sports a record of 18 wins (with 7 KOs) and 2 losses (2 KOs by). “Devin is the only Mexican-Polish fighter in the world,” Elbaum states. “On a given night, he can beat anyone.”

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Joey Abell, also 31, has had three fights in the last thirty months and been knocked out in two of them. His sole victory during that time was a fourth-round stoppage of a gentleman named Emerson Chasing Bear at Williston College in North Dakota. Mr. Bear has one victory in his last six fights. Abell's record stands at 28 wins (with 27 KOs) and 6 losses (4 KOs by). "Look at his knockout percentage," Elbaum instructs. "Except for Earnie Shavers, Joey is the hardest punching heavyweight I've ever seen."

Alonzo Butler, age 33, is from Tennessee and hasn't won a fight in more than three years. Fighting mostly at home in the past, he has 28 wins (with 21 KOs) and 2 losses. "Alonzo is one of the best heavyweights in the world," Elbaum advises. "He rededicated himself to boxing recently, and now everyone is afraid to fight him."

Emmanuel Nwodo, age 38, has fought three times in the past five years. In one of those fights, he was knocked out in the fourth round. In the other two, he beat 43-year-old Lenzie Morgan (Morgan's fifteenth loss in a row) and Michael Shanks (now on a thirteen-fight losing streak that includes eleven knockout losses). Nwodo's own record stands at 24 wins (with 20 KOs) and 5 losses (4 KOs by). Nwodo is from Nigeria. But Elbaum says that he now lives in Baltimore, which "makes him an American."

As the fighters gathered at Gleason's, the man Elbaum calls "the tournament dark horse" and "one of the most exciting prospects I've seen in my life" stood off to the side wearing blue jeans, work boots, and a gold T shirt with "Let's Go Mountaineers" emblazoned across his chest.

Daniel Martz is 22 years old, 6-feet-7-inches tall, and weighs 257 pounds. He's a likable young man, who lives in Clarksburg, West Virginia, and works as a server at Applebee's. He enjoys "hanging out with my buddies and having a good time; eating pizza and stuff like that."

The trip to New York marked the first time that Martz had been on a plane.

"It was two planes, actually," he noted. "The first was a real small plane from Clarksburg to Washington. That plane was too small. It made me nervous. The plane from Washington to New York was kind of fun. Then I had my first cab ride in New York. I'm used to the small

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towns, and New York is a big crazy place. The cab ride made me more nervous than the plane. I haven't ridden the subway yet, but I've heard some interesting stories about it."

Martz's amateur career consisted of nine fights in two toughman tournaments. He won all nine and turned pro last year. Since then, he has fought seven times, scoring seven wins and six knockouts.

"I love fighting," Martz says. "I love everything about it. I love getting paid. I love traveling. I've fought in places like Pennsylvania and Indiana. I used to want to play football, but it turned out I was better at fighting. I know I have to improve before I make it big. I have a local trainer. We're working on the technical stuff. It's coming together pretty quick. My goal is to be heavyweight champion of the world. Someone has to win it. It might as well be me."

A quick look at Martz on YouTube shows a fighter who's still learning the basics. For starters, he brings his jab back very slowly and very low, which leaves him very vulnerable to a righthand over the top.

"That doesn't worry me," Elbaum says. "Anyone who hits Daniel on the chin will break his hand. His jaw is like concrete."

What about the fact that Martz has never gone past four rounds?

"No problem," Elbaum answers. "I don't think there's a fighter in the world who can last five rounds with him."

Elbaum says he has offers "from all over the world, including China" to host the tournament. But since this is a patriotic venture, he'd prefer a site in America.

He's also looking for "a few more angles to dress up the show."

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“It would be great if I could get Mick Jagger to sing the national anthem,” he muses. “I know that’s a longshot. And I’d love it if I could get Sharon Stone as a roundcard girl or the ring announcer. I think Sharon Stone is hot. I don’t suppose you have a telephone number for her.”

“No,” this writer answers. “But maybe you could put a hyphen in the tournament acronym. That way, it would read, ‘TGA-HBO’”.

“Jesus! You’re a genius. Why didn’t I think of that?”

So . . . What can boxing fans realistically hope for from The Great American Heavyweight Box-Off?

“There’s no Mike Tysons in the tournament,” Elbaum acknowledges.

There might not even be a Frans Botha. But if each round of the tournament offers evenly-matched heavyweights in entertaining club fights, it could be fun.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at [thauser@rcn.com](mailto:thauser@rcn.com). His most recent book (*And the New: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing*) was published by the University of Arkansas Press.

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**Radam G says:**

More like the Great American fatty-and-tally bums fight-off. Boring! Holla!

**deepwater says:**

hot dog eating contest at gleasons! sad group great gym

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