



Springtime in Southern California can be the best time of the year. With temperatures in the 80s and a brisk wind blowing through the Cajon Pass, we breezed up the mountain freeway toward Las Vegas in speedy fashion with the wind at our backs.

Of course, we had to look out for the Highway Patrol.

It was Thursday morning and after a three hour drive or less, we motored right up to the 50 Cent Boxing Gym on the west side of the Las Vegas Strip. A group of cars including a sterling looking Bentley were parked in front of the spanking new boxing facility.

Avila's Las Vegas Fight Journal: May Day 2013

Written by David A. Avila
Thursday, 09 May 2013 16:17

Media types roamed outside of the gym so we looked for a doorway and walked right through. The place was packed with reporters and boxers. In one of the boxing rings a fighter was getting his hands wrapped. On the corner was Roy Jones Jr. who looked our way. As I scoured the gym I spotted Muhammad Mubarak, a boxing journalist and artist who waved me over.

Mubarak showed us around the brand new gym including the sauna, lunch room, weight room and treadmills. The inside of the spacious boxing gym was designed with red, white and some black. And on the west corner of the gym was an artist rendering of "The Greatest," Muhammad Ali.

"I did that," said Mubarak, who has produced some great artwork over the years.

Over all, the boxing gym was very impressive, including the art work.

Finally the boxer's hands were fully wrapped and he began to do mitt work. Once I saw the boxer's face I realized it was Canada's light heavyweight Jean Pascal. He was in the middle of preparations for his clash with fellow Canadian Lucian Bute. A few days later the fight would be canceled because of an injury suffered by Bute.

Pascal looked over toward me as if trying to figure out who I was. So did Roy Jones Jr. Maybe I've changed a bit. Or maybe they recognized me but can't remember from where. Pascal hit the mitts but kept dropping his hands after connections. It seemed like a bad habit forming right before my eyes. Nobody said anything.

Later on, Yuri Gamboa showed up and was standing up on the ring watching Pascal do his mitt work. A few other fighters are mulling around the media guys with cameras, recorders and notebooks.

After an hour I and photographer Al Applerose decided we had seen enough and headed toward our hotel that we booked for the weekend.

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We killed time waiting to meet with a boxer and trainer at a designated time. During our wait we received a phone call from a very good friend. We decide to change course and meet with our friend at an Italian deli. Meanwhile, the trainer and boxer couldn't make the appointment so things worked out fine. After a few deli sandwiches we headed out to a comedy club inside the Plaza Hotel. It's called The Guidos of Comedy at the Bonkerz Club. We all had some laughs from the three comics and head out toward another section of Las Vegas. This time we're going to see a new movie, Iron Man 3. It's in 3D. It starts at midnight. I'm falling asleep during the commercials and previews then the movie started and I definitely can say that the film was never boring. Around 3:30 a.m. we all go our separate ways. By the time I sleep it's already 4:30 a.m.

Friday

I can't really sleep past 8 a.m. so I head to a Starbucks to grab a cup of Joe. It doesn't really taste good. But I start receiving phone calls from the boxing trainer we missed the previous evening and make an appointment to meet in North Las Vegas.

We meet at Nevada Partners where a boxing gym used to be located. Now it's more of a community center and we eat at the cafeteria with two trainers and a conditioning coach. These are really good people that I've known for just a few years but it seems I've known them for longer. They're real boxing people who know the sport and though they don't need it in their lives, they still are big contributors in their own ways. After a great breakfast and good conversation we leave our separate ways.

After a short drive we reach the MGM Grand and park in its monstrous parking structure. I've heard of people getting lost in there for hours. We find an open space right near the stairwell and close to the casino itself. I feel like George Costanza in "Seinfeld" who keeps talking about the great parking spot he found like some conquering hero. "Can you believe that parking space I got? Is that a great spot or what!"

We walk a short way to get our press credentials. I notice that security has been beefed up quite a bit. It's a sign of the times. The weigh-ins are going to start in a few hours and we file our way through the crowd already gathering. I'm about 20 feet from the media center when I spot a familiar face and she spots me at the same time. It's Brandy Badry, a female prizefighter from Canada that I met several years ago in Palm Springs. She's a tall brunette with striking looks and numerous tattoos. She loves the fight game and always has enthusiasm about anything

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related to prizefighting. We talk a short while and she introduces her friends and I introduce her to photographer Al Applerose, then we part ways. She promises to let me know when she fights again.

People are trying to gain entrance to the media room but security guards are vigilant. They wave us through. One of them recognizes me and says "I'm not ignoring you, it's just these people are trying to get in."

Inside there must be over 100 reporters sitting, standing or mulling around with their heads pointed down as they look at their cell phones. We head toward the front of the room that is less crowded and I spot some open tables and outlets to sit down. Along the way I shake hands with LA Times' Lance Pugmire, BoxingScene.com's Rick Reeno reaches out, as does Norm Fraueheim of the Phoenix newspaper Arizona Republic. I end up finding a space near Ryan Maquinana, a young talented sportswriter. I see Mia St. John who is being questioned or interviewed by a couple of people. We wave at each other. She's wearing red. She's dressed to kill. She's always dressed to kill.

Once I sit a few of my friends drop over and we discuss the fights. Everyone wants to know who is picking who. I usually don't reveal my picks because it causes discord with the fighters especially if I don't pick them to win. So I usually refrain. Press agents get upset by this but they don't know our end. They just want to publish in their press releases which reporters are picking which fighters. I'd rather piss off a press agent than a fighter. Years back, I lost touch with Fernando Vargas because of a pick. For years I couldn't get an interview with the "Ferocious" one. Things are cool now, but back then I had to improvise. Since then I rarely give predictions on record.

Around 2:30 p.m. most of the reporters and photographers run toward the arena to record the weigh-ins. Floyd Mayweather's team and Robert Guerrero's team are already in the arena awaiting their turn to stand and pose.

I stay behind and watch the whole thing in the media room. It's being televised on a big screen and it's more comfortable to sit back and watch and type out a report if necessary. Nothing much happens.

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After the proceedings the reporters begin filing back into the media center. One of the people that walk up to me is Mia St. John so we talk a while about this and that. I've known Mia for about 15 years now. She hasn't changed in appearance much. She still dazzles. Later, Sue Bird of the WBC walks over and we all chat. Women's boxing is the topic and later a few more women's boxing advocates walk over too. Everyone has a theory on women's boxing and why it hasn't succeeded so far. It's obvious, but most do not see the obvious. They point toward other more ridiculous reasons. Those that know women's boxing understand its all about exposure. Female boxing is rarely televised. You can count the number of times female boxing has been shown on TV by the number of total eclipses that take place. It's rare. Most people don't understand that simple fact.

Around 4:30 p.m. we began gathering our equipment to head toward the Cosmopolitan Resort nearby on the Strip. It's a swanky hotel casino with an incredible chandelier in the main room and has been a hot spot for every well-dressed 20 to 40-year old since it opened. I've yet to watch a boxing match in its confines so I'm a little curious. We go through a maze of configurations trying to locate the ballroom where the fight card is going to take place. On the fourth floor we're guiding to a desk where a kind woman checks the list and gives our credentials to us. Inside there are many journalists and boxing fans waiting to get inside. A few boxing people ask me where to pick up credentials. I run into an old boxing fan who I hadn't seen in many years. He was an avid reader of mine and lets me know that he has moved to Lancaster and can't read my stories any more. He doesn't have Internet so he relies on newspapers. He complains that La Opinion doesn't cover boxing as much as La Prensa in the Inland Empire or Riverside Press-Enterprise. But here he is alone, anxious to watch boxing. He says his friends all like soccer instead. So he comes to the fights alone. We talk awhile until its time for media to take their seats.

As we walk inside I'm caught by surprise at the enormity of the ballroom. On the far side is a slew of blackjack tables with dealers. On the other side is a food cafeteria. I spot Paul Malignaggi but decide not to bother greeting him, he's busy covering the fight card for Showtime. I also see a number of fighters in street clothes who are there to watch the fights and be seen. Jesus Soto Karass, Andre Berto, Gamboa, Ana Julaton, Artemio Reyes Jr., Andre Dirrell and rap artist and promoter 50 Cent are all there.

Julaton, who is working as a journalist that night, asks to sit next to me. The seat is vacant. Doug Fischer is on the other side of me and we all exchange boxing conversation until the fight card begins. Fischer is the best boxing writer in the world in my estimation and not just for his writing skills, but for his overall knowledge about the sport. It's the kind of knowledge that most so-called boxing journalists do not have simply because they seldom visit boxing gyms. Fischer visits them constantly. Other journalists merely visit gyms on media day and only know about the sport from watching it on television. Boxing writers from other eras must be kicking in their

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graves at most boxing writers today. They used to literally camp out in boxing gyms like the Main Street Gym in Los Angeles or other places around the country.

There are very few true boxing writers today like Fischer. I've known him for about 14 years and he knows his craft. A few others like Gabe Montoya, Joe Miranda, Francisco Salazar, Elie Seckbach and Igor Frank are journalists that actually visit various gyms and see the new kids being groomed for the big time. They know who's good long before the so-called experts on television declare them as newly discovered talent.

A few of the guys I've been watching for years are fighting on the Cosmo card like Antonio Orozco against Jose Reynoso. It's the main reason I'm attending this card. These guys have battled in sparring and now it's for real. In the end Orozco ends it with a knockout win over southpaw Reynoso. It's a good fight and sad at the same time for someone like me who has seen the Riverside fighter as an amateur and climb to main event status. I also saw Orozco as an amateur and here he is too.

Another fighter of interest is Anthony Dirrell, who had been out of action for more than a year because of a motorcycle accident. His opponent Don Mouton is a tough cookie that I've seen before. They walloped each other mercilessly trying to prove who was tougher. After the beating they hugged and shook each other for giving such a great show. People were impressed. Dirrell won the decision but Mouton won the hearts of the fans with his effort. It's a tough sport.

Recent U.S. Olympians Joseph Diaz Jr. and Errol Spence Jr. both won their respective fights by knockout. They looked very good, probably the best I've seen them since they turned professional. Another Olympian heavyweight, Dominic Breazeale, also won by knockout.

Between fights female prizefighter Julaton gave a few of her opinions on the fights and proved insightful and intelligent. No surprise. She's a former world champion and has experienced the good and bad of the sport. She's looking for another world title bid, but in the meanwhile, Julaton is working as a journalist. She says she can appreciate the other side of boxing now.

After I file my story I looked around to see who was still around. Nobody. I'm last man standing. Photographer Applerose is waiting for me and we head to our hotel. It's 12:30 p.m. but in the main casino area the Cosmopolitan is flooded with girls walking hand in hand through the glitzy

hotel. It's late.

Saturday

At 7 a.m. I awake and grab coffee downstairs instead of at Starbucks. The coffee at the hotel is much better. I walk to the sports book to see what transpired the night before and discover that my favorite team the L.A. Clippers got trounced again. The Clippers have been my favorite team since Bill Walton joined them in the mid-80s. I used to have season tickets that I paid only \$180 for because nobody wanted to see them play. They were mostly bad all of these decades until the last two years. But they lost. So did the Lakers earlier in the week. Oh well.

After showering and dressing I head out toward an auto parts store to get some fluid for my steering column. It's making noise and we can't take a chance waiting to get back to Southern California. I get a number of phone calls as we drive to the MGM Grand for a press conference at 10:30 a.m.

I grab my media credential outside the arena and literally run into Gabe Rosado who is fighting later in the day. We both go through the guard rail and I head up an escalator for the media center.

To my surprise there are a couple of hundred reporters at the morning press conference for Paul Malignaggi and Adrian Broner. They're scheduled to fight on June 22 at Barclays Center Arena in Brooklyn. It's going to be good.

Broner speaks first and starts ranting about some supposed ex-girlfriend of Malignaggi that now likes "the Problem." It gets chuckles from his group of followers all dressed in red but not too much from the press. It's kind of like an inside joke I guess. He then talks about his willingness to move up in weight and challenge Malignaggi, a true welterweight and holder of the WBA welterweight world title. It's good stuff. Broner is talented and has the ability to make the jump.

Malignaggi gets his turn and rebuts several of Broner's comments including the so-called ex-girlfriend. By the time the Brooklyn speedster finished both he and Broner are exchanging

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remarks and quips at machine gun pace. This is Malignaggi's pace. He's whip quick with the verbal exchanges. It gets x-rated at times but everyone is a grown up in the media center. I see a couple of women wince during the verbal warfare. It doesn't bother me. It all rolls off my East L.A. bred-back like dry leaves.

After the conference Mia St. John and I discussed her retirement and also talked about the challenges of quitting the game. She recently was stopped by welterweight champion Cecilia Braekhus but received a hefty payday. It took place in Denmark and St. John said the Danes treated her first class. She plans to attend the fight and I tell her I will look for her inside as we part.

We had missed the breakfast set up for the media so Applerose and I decide to grab something to eat. Wolfgang Puck sounds good. As we leave Bernard Hopkins is about to be interviewed by Jerry Hoffman on radio. All you need is one opening question and Hopkins will take over the show. Two hours later I return from eating lunch and picking up my wife and Hopkins is still talking. He's the great orator, believe it. Plus, he's one of the few master boxers of the 21st century.

Around 2 p.m. I walk outside to meet fellow reporter Katherine Rodriguez who is covering the fight card too. It's been awhile since we saw each other so we talk awhile. She has come to Vegas with her boyfriend and we converse a little about the fight card.

It's already fight time so I scurry inside and find out I missed two fights. I hate missing fights because a lot of these young fighters depend on us journalists to cover them. Many of them will never be on televised bouts so this is their moment. It turns out Badou Jack won by third round knockout in a light heavyweight bout and Lanell Bellows scored a knockout in the fourth round of a super middleweight match.

By the time I enter the arena DonYil Livingston is fighting undefeated Luis Arias in a six round battle of 168-pounders. It's a good even match that ends with Arias winning by majority decision. A draw seemed like a better call.

Other winners on the night were Ronald Gavril by knockout. Leo Santa Cruz moved up to junior featherweight and knocked out Alexander Munoz. And in a good scrap J'Leon Love beat

Gabriel Rosado.

Probably the most entertaining fight took place between Abner Mares a former bantamweight and junior featherweight world champion moving up in weight to challenge friend and WBC featherweight champion Daniel Ponce de Leon. They really are friends and both are managed by Frank Espinoza one of the best boxing managers in the world. It was a fight proposed by Golden Boy Promotions and neither fighter nixed it so it went through. Mares and Ponce de Leon are also former Mexican Olympians and they also have the city of Montebello as yet another connection. Ponce de Leon has his gym located in that suburban town and Mares lives in Montebello, which borders East L.A.

Friends cannot exist in the boxing ring once the bell rings. To prove that point Mares floors Ponce de Leon in the second round with a vicious left hook-right cross combination. The champion had a look of shock as he got up off the floor as if surprised by Mares' power. Ponce de Leon rallied a bit during the next few rounds and it looked like he might return the favor. Instead, in rounds seven through nine Mares began finding the range again. In the ninth round especially Mares hit Ponce de Leon with a right hand that dropped him in a heap. He beat the count but Mares cornered him and fired at least eight more right hands through Ponce's guard. After one of the blows connects, Ponce's eyes rolled back a la Jose Luis Castillo when Diego Corrales belted him in their most famous fight. Referee Jay Nady stops this fight.

"It hurt me," said Mares after he knocked down Ponce de Leon. "He's a friend."

Espinoza, who manages both fighters, said it was one of the strangest feelings he ever experienced in boxing.

"It was an awkward situation," said Espinoza who formerly managed Israel Vazquez, Martin Castillo and Yonhhy Perez. "On one side it was a great feeling but on the other it was heart breaking."

The main event was the reason many of the nearly sold out crowd came in person to witness.

Was Floyd Mayweather going to be able to ward off the younger southpaw power-boxer Robert Guerrero?

Based in his previous fight against Miguel Cotto which saw Mayweather get beat up quite a bit using the shoulder roll defense, I was convinced he could not beat "The Ghost." Apparently Mayweather realized that too and allowed his father Big Floyd Mayweather to train him for this fight. It worked out perfectly. Big Floyd taught Little Floyd how to fight like Old Floyd and use his legs to move around like skates. It was the only way he could beat Guerrero and he did it with smoothness and a lot less punishment than against Cotto.

"The less you get hit the longer you can last," is what Mayweather said his father told him.

Great advice.

We arrived home at 4 a.m. in Southern California.

deepwater says:

I cant finish this article.

dino da vinci says:

[QUOTE=deepwater;30457]I cant finish this article.[/QUOTE]

Darn Gen X. If it's longer than a sentence, they want no part of it. What's also ironic is the term deepwater refers to taking an opponent deep into the later rounds where inexperience of tempo and stamina issues surface. So, while I'm not sure, I believe David Avila is credited with scoring a late stoppage over Deepwater, like maybe in the 11th paragraph.

deepwater says:

[QUOTE=dino da vinci;30459]Darn Gen X. If it's longer than a sentence, they want no part of it. What's also ironic is the term deepwater refers to taking an opponent deep into the later rounds where inexperience of tempo and stamina issues surface. So, while I'm not sure, I believe David Avila is credited with scoring a late stoppage over Deepwater, like maybe in the 11th paragraph. [/Q ha ha good one. I made it thru Friday. It went some like this, I went to the bathroom and used 5 pieces of toilet paper, then I saw Paulie m., I didn't want to interrupt, then I saw a guy look at something, then I drove to the gym ,a Bentley was there, the gym is red and white, Roy

Jones looked at me. oh whatever its all good I just cant get thru it. give me some more frank L ! I am at the cut off of x. you must be a baby boomer is my guess. Dino you don't have that much time to be reading this article.:

Radam G says:

Hehehehe! Funny as heck, deepwater! Holla!

Radam G says:

Nice read, but long, so I got on my speed reading.

Mia and Ana were looking gorgeous. And my six-year old told me not to holla. Danggit! These kids nowadays are so dang smart. They can read a dirty mind. Hehehe!

I need to get him a new nanny. A mean one that will get him out of grown folks' business. Holla!

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ali says:

Deepwater hilarious brah..

amayseng says:

That's a funny back and forth all together.

Radam what the hell u do that u can afford a nanny?

Radam a millionaire.

dino da vinci says:

@Deep. Very much a Baby Boomer but with the attention span of a gnat. Surprisingly, I love the more in depth articles. Deep, there were two guys who wrote for The Ring Magazine as stringers back in the day. They would do it in diary form. 'Went to this diner, diner #1072. Ordered the waffle special. Big portion and reasonably priced at \$1.99, so the card starts an

hour late which is an improvement over promoters last show'...

The readership found it endearing. Can't remember their names, but memory tells me "KO" JO & ???... Ahh, I'm drawing a blank right now. Tomorrow I'll be driving down the street and come up with both of them. But that's the style David is emulating for these road trip type pieces.

dino da vinci says:

[QUOTE=amayseng;30475]That's a funny back and forth all together.

Radam what the hell u do that u can afford a nanny?

Radam a millionaire.[/QUOTE]

Oh yeah. That's what I have it narrowed down to also. Radam is either a millionaire, or serving life without possibility of parole.

Radam G says:

Ddv, danggit! My evil-twin wife got me "serving life without the possibility of parole." But I often escape. And hide behind the drapes in plain sight all the way through the night. I will tap you on your shoulder and you still won't see me. Hahaha!

@Amayseng, I'm in the family biz of this and that. And it is phat. Hehehe! Holla!

Carmine Cas says:

Great read