

Is HBO Still Top U.S. Television Platform?

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Thursday, 26 December 2013 13:44



Despite inroads made by rival Showtime this year, the folks over at HBO Boxing still consider themselves to be the leading television platform for the sport of boxing in the U.S.

It's hard to argue with them. HBO Boxing delivered 21 of the top 25 bouts to date on cable television in 2013. In fact, the top five audiences for fights on cable television in 2013 were all presented by HBO:

1. Cotto vs. Rodriguez -- 1.6 million viewers (1,706,000 peak viewership)
2. Chavez Jr. vs. Vera -- 1.4 million viewers (1,542,000 peak viewership)
3. Golovkin vs. Stevens – 1.4 million viewers (1,566,000 peak viewership)
4. Broner vs. Rees -- 1.4 million viewers (1,551,000 peak viewership)
5. Stevenson vs. Bellew – 1.3 million viewers (1,358,000 peak viewership)

(Note -- Showtime Sports V.P. Stephen Espinoza announced Broner-Maidana garnered 1.3 million viewers to tie for No. 5 rated cable boxing show this year.)

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HBO's partnership with Top Rank, as well as other first-class promotional entities such as Main Events, K2 and Dibella Entertainment, yielded them a bevy of boxing superstars to feature on Saturday nights. HBO's current roster includes Sergio Martinez, Andre Ward, Manny Pacquiao, Gennady Golovkin, Timothy Bradley Jr., Mikey Garcia, Wladimir Klitschko, Juan Manuel Marquez, Julio Cesar Chavez Jr., Miguel Cotto, Carl Froch and Nonito Donaire.

HBO has also become home to an impressive group of newcomers. Fighters who made their HBO debut in 2013 include Sergey Kovalev, Adonis Stevenson, Ruslan Provodnikov and Terence Crawford.

Big Mac award winner for Fighter of the Year, Guillermo Rigondeaux, appeared on HBO twice in 2013.

Moreover, HBO Boxing presented four Fight of the Year candidates in 2013. Bouts like Bradley vs. Provodnikov, Rios vs. Alvarado II, Froch vs. Kessler II and Alvarado vs. Provodnikov kept fans glued to their seats with spills, thrills and riveting action.

And name me a bigger up-and-coming superstar than Gennady Golovkin. The middleweight monster took the boxing world by storm in 2013, and he should only continue to build his brand under HBO's banner for years to come.

HBO Boxing traveled to four continents in 2013, North America, Europe, South America and Asia, illustrating the sport's global appeal and reach as well as HBO's commitment to follow Top Rank headfirst into the global boxing market.

For example, Pacquiao-Rios was fought in Macau, China where local fans of Chinese amateur star Zhou Shiming could see him notch a win on his professional resume firsthand.

The trend should only continue in 2014. Top Rank signed several amateur stars this year including American junior welterweight Jose Ramirez, Mexican featherweight Oscar Valdez,

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Puerto Rican junior lightweight Felix Verdejo and two-time Ukrainian Olympic champion Vasyl Lomachenko. All of them are shoe-ins to become HBO regulars.

Finally, HBO Sports re-launched its Emmy-Award-winning franchise "Legendary Nights" in 2013. The film aired on Oct. 19 and revisited the classic Arturo Gatti vs. Mickey Ward rivalry. It aired immediately following junior welterweight Ruslan Provodnikov's thrilling triumph over Mike Alvarado in Denver and was met with fairly universal rave reviews.

So is HBO still top dog among cable TV outlets in the U.S.? And will that continue in 2014? It sure seems so, but with Showtime ever cutting into HBO's subscriber lead (around 18 million or so more a decade ago to just about 5 million this year) and constantly breathing down the television giant's neck, expect even more bang for you buck in 2014. That's good news for fight fans, and something to look forward to as the New Year approaches.

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The Shadow says:

Good question. Showtime has the bigger budget so right now, no. They also have the biggest star.

In terms of history, yes. In terms of overall subscribers, yes. But that one is going to be gone soon, too.

Based on the above, I say they're co-leaders. There are good arguments for both.

Radam G says:

I don't believe the hype of Showtime, The Shadow. It is a long-time arrogant bullsyeter, which is always going to overtake HBO, a mild bullsyeter. Nearly my whole life, I've heard that Showtime is quickly rising and is overtaking HBO.

It is something about Showtime that keeps it below HBO in every department. And Showtime keeps talking loud and doing nothing. And 90 percent of its Al Hyman [intentionally misspelled] fighters are perpetrating frauds and are on "dat s***," as Pops Joy May calls roids and PEDs. Showtime needs legit fight super experts.

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Letting Broner fight Maidana was super boxing stupid. Dude is not only raw, but disturbed. As are Wilder and Russell. Danggit! A lot of Showtime top stars will have a bad 2014 if they fight a warn body. Holla!

brownsugar says:

Not that I care about any programming networks that sucks the hard earned disposable income from my petite size wallet.I don't..... and I make it a habit to unsubscribe for a few months every year because watching TV is not a life sustaining activity for me.

Enter Showtime: The dinky weasely cable network was never a necessity when it came to watching boxing. The presentation was raw... and the the no frills announcing team was knowledgable but those guys couldnt hold a candle to longtime boxing Icons Merchant, Lampley, and Lewis. ... And their best show "Dexter"couldn't hold a candle to "True Blood"

Thus it was easy to keep my showtime subscription limited to just a few must watch shows per year.

But gradually I found myself connected to Showtime intravenously over the last 18 months much like a junky connected to a morphine drip in order to stave off the near fatal withdrawal symptoms that come from going cold turkey.

Maybe it was the mass exodus of the Al Hayman stable... Maybe its the huge number of can't miss bouts being aired by the promoter instigated "Berlin Wall of Boxing" to attract new viewers.. Maybe it was the migration of the Money Team. Or maybe its because I couldn't tolerate getting only a Half-Deck of boxing by subscribing to only one network.

All I know is that Showtime has surprisingly become a necessity. ...and if it weren't for Kovalev and GGG I'd probably nix HBO indefinitely.

Whether or not my current condition is curable by counseling... I can only hope. But its not situation that I'm pleased with.... Damn you Showtime.

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Bernie Campbell says:

Which one was Hung! Gag me please!! still have protest about a Liberaci Trailer the vultures put right before Kessler and Froch! Out! Bring on PBS!

brownsugar says:

I remember that... odd timing for a Liberaci commercial.

Neither Boardwalk, Treme, Game of Thrones, or Hung can compare with the low budget Walking Dead. Best show not on a major network.

amayseng says:

The walking dead is good but the best show in the last five years on any network is Breaking Bad. phenomenal show.

I prefer Al Bernstein to any commentator, except for the great late Eman Steward.

apparently HBO has had the better cards but showtime has def improved with good quality cards this past

year or two.

I just hope we get to see ggg, Kovalev and Stevenson another 3-4x this coming year.

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"Bad" has been recommended to me more than any other Show...still haven't scene it yet... Yeah...Bhop vs Kovalev 2014!!!!

ultimoshogun says:

I agree with Shadow about the two being just about even... Showtime definitely has some momentum right now though. One thing I can say for sure is that I like the fight team Showtime has put together better than HBO's. I've always liked Brian Kenney cuz he would never shy away from asking the tough questions when he was on FNF. Mauro Ranallo, I've been watching since he used to call fights for PRIDE over in Japan, I like how he brings a sense of excitement when calling the action... and surprisingly Malignaggi is a helluva commentator himself...and then of course Al Bernstein...So because of those four guys, I've been enjoying Showtime's fights a little more than HBO's

amayseng says:

that is right Ultimoshogun the showtime panel of commentators are superior to hbo.

The Shadow says:

Keep in mind, HBO lost two of their premier commentators in Merchant and Steward. Now they have Andre Ward, who I don't feel is better than Paulie, Jim Lampley, who's still the man, and that jabroni Steve Weisfeld.

Before, Showtime used to substitute announcers like hos on the track so there was never any chance to build homogeneity, continuity, consistency and ultimately a connection with audience.

It seemed like The Super Six had new announcers every time. I had no idea who the lead announcer was. Only guy I recognized was Jim Gray.

Remember, announcers enhance the telecasts and, in some cases, the memory of the call or the announce team outlives the moment itself. In some cases they even become the draw

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because they can make you care!

Case in point:

- Gorilla Monsoon/Bobby Heenan "Will you stop it!"
- Jerry Lawler/Jim Ross "Stone Cold!!! Stone Cold!!!"
- Howard Cossell "Down goes Frazier!!!"
- Jim Lampley "IT HAPPENED!"
- George Foreman bickering with Merchant...

HBO had that advantage. Now that they're bringing new guys in, they're losing that while SHO has their set lineup along with Brian Kenny, a respected figure from ESPN.

If they could somehow coup Max K., that would be huge.

I'd say HBO may still have a slight edge in overall production quality. But that gap is closing also. SHO has some pretty cool innovations with the replays and such.

Looking forward to 2014.

Here's an interesting read on a totally different topic:

[url]<http://www.fighthype.com/pages/content11641.html>

Let me know if \$40m upfront + 35 percent of PPV over a minimum threshold is such a bad deal.....

Hey, wouldn't it be ironic to see Uncle Bob on this show?

[url]<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZauC0ZTqggI>

ultimoshogun says:

I forgot to add I also prefer Jimmy Lennon Jr. over Michael Buffer and that other HBO guy as well.

Domenic says:

Showtime was constant in the 90's with Steve Albert, Ferdie Pacheco, and Bobby Czyz. I liked that trio.

The Shadow says:

You're right, Domenic, I liked that trio, too. Keep the lineup for a few years and they'll develop even better chemistry.

Bernie Campbell says:

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Get out from the HBO and Showtime, FNFs, Utilize the airwaves of PBS! Joe Franklin future Tsar of Boxing Media! Axe Hirschman and Henchman!