

Now, Onto the Real Fights

Written by Steve Kim

Monday, 29 November 1999 19:00

Ding dong the witch is dead. Mike Tyson has been vanquished and with it the last vestiges of the 'Iron Mike' that tore through the heavyweight division in the late 80's. Lennox Lewis, in knocking the starch out of Tyson didn't save any of us from the apocalypse or save western civilization(although, HBO would argue that point) but what he did do was signal a new age of boxing.

Not necessarily inside the ring, after a couple of hundred years under the 'Marquis of Queensberry' regulations, boxing has pretty much evolved as much as it's ever going to. But what Lewis' knockout of Tyson brings about is the passing of an era where boxing was too often overshadowed by shadowy figures and oftentimes, proven by Tyson, dependant on them.

Throughout his turbulent times, Tyson's tail would wag the boxing dog, time and time again. Rules were routinely broken and regulations(in and out of the ring) were oftentimes ignored.

Now, that Tyson's market value has hit rock-bottom he can no longer be the 800-pound gorilla(and you know where they sit-anywhere they want to). And with that, Tyson can no longer be portrayed by the general media as the poster-boy for boxing. Tyson, ceased being about 'the sweet science' long ago.

Lewis, not only saved boxing from Tyson, but he reaffirmed certain tried and true adages that this game was built upon according to HBO's sage boxing analyst, Larry Merchant.

" I think in the boxing world there was a certain dread that Tyson would once again become the dominant figure in the sport," explained Merchant. " Overshadowing all of the outstanding fighters and good guys in the game.

So I suppose there is a sense of relief about what happened. But also I think there's a certain relief, in that, what you call the 'eternal varieties' of the sport were confirmed.

" That you can't go 10 years fighting just one good fighter, get whipped both times and fight a bunch of set-ups and be prepared to step-up to the highest level and just get in shape for that one fight and turn the clock back 15 years and be the guy many fantasized you were and just perform at that level. You can't do that, so on those two levels, I think there was a certain amount of relief in the boxing world."

And what Lewis-Tyson proved is that boxing, at it's purest essence , is the hardest and toughest game of them all. Not something that can be necessarily preordained or scripted to make the most money- as so many cynics openly suggest. Tyson, in all reality was a badly faded fighter, living off the reputation that he earned during the time the United States had it's first Bush in office and had feasted on a collection of Triple A practitioners. Lewis, had proven time and time again that he was a major league quality heavyweight. Reality would win out over fantasy, thus restoring some of the faith that many had lost in the sport.

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" Maybe, to some degree subconsciously," said Merchant, who was ringside in Memphis as Lewis took apart Tyson." that a lot of people have got to think of boxing as a kind of WWF, where there were master puppeteers behind the scenes deciding what went on and where money or the prospect of making money always triumphed and where the guy who yelled the loudest, most obscene things would somehow always triumph in an immoral world.

" So in that sense, yes. But I wouldn't make too much of it because we should celebrate boxing getting rid of a black eye because more often than not, boxing manages to get black eyes."

True, and what's great about this weekends fight in Las Vegas between Marco Antonio Barrera and Erik Morales is that you have two angry Mexican's who want to do nothing more than blacken each others eye's time and time again.

In fact, both Barrera and Morales will be seperated throughout the week leading up to the fight to ensure that the rematch doesn't take place before Saturday night. Lewis and Tyson were seperated for a whole different reason- to protect the financial interests of those who had chosen to milk the cash cow that was Tyson(namely Showtime and Shelly Finkel). As soon as the first bell rung for that fight, the fight was won, Tyson would be able to pay off the debts owed to various entities and the cable companies(HBO and Showtime, who jointly produced the pay-per-view telecast) would line their coffers by not having to issue refunds juuuuust in case Tyson somehow sabotaged this fight again.

Barrera-Morales II is a rematch of one of the best fights of recent memory. Their first encounter in February of 2000 was 12-rounds of skill and savagery that was riveting as it was frightening in it's violence and danger. And what makes it so appealing is that both men promise to bring much of the same this weekend. It's an authentic fight, between authentic fighters.

" I've always looked forward to this weekend because it seems that we had a pretty good idea of what we were going to get(on June 8th)," explained Merchant, who will be part of the broadcast team on Saturday night." There's a real emotional feeling between the two fighters, they are the best in the world, one of them isn't a fake challenger who's gotten there by hype and reputation, rather than achievement. And it's a sequel to one of the great fights of recent times and we know were going to have a passionate crowd there for both fighters. It doesn't get much better than that."

No it doesn't.

WHAT ABOUT BOB?

Bob Arum is the lead promoter for Barrera-Morales II, what would he have thought of a Tyson win?

" I thought that a Tyson win would have been horrific for boxing," said the president of Top Rank Boxing, who has promoted the likes of Marvin Hagler and Oscar De La Hoya

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throughout his career." A crazy incident would have been horrific for boxing. Thank God, Lennox Lewis did what he was supposed to do and there were no incidents, it went off like a normal fight.'

CAMP TYSON

One person that wasn't surprised by Tyson's lethargic performance was his former trainer Tommy Brooks. Brooks was let go by Team Tyson over, what else, money. As Tyson was looking to cut corners as he was swimming in red ink. Brooks, like many others in the game, wonder why would Tyson train in the less-than-Spartan conditions of Maui, Hawaii.

" C'mon, you gotta be kidding me," said Brooks, who's now working with the Klitschko brothers." I mean, first off all, if a guy is supposed to be broke, why are you training in Maui? I mean you gotta import everything there. And number two, that's a vacation spot, man. You got people on vacation there, from what I understand the weed is flowing like wine. So those guys partake in that type of thing, it's kinda hard to stay focused and do what you're supposed to do."

TIME WARNER-AOL

HBO's boxing budget is one of the victims of the Time Warner-AOL merger which has been one of the most disastrous in recent memory.

IBF lightweight titlist Paul Spadafora and his people were negotiating to take on WBO titlist Arturo Grigorian on August 17th, but instead will now take on Stefano Zoff because according to my sources, HBO wanted to save some bucks on that fight so they could put another fight on that 'Boxing After Dark' telecast.

So what was potentially a matchup of two undefeated lightweight titlists is now a nondescript bout between Spadafora and a 36-year old European fighter nobody cares about.

Also, the October 5th telecast featuring the rematch of Floyd Mayweather and Jose Luis Castillo, as of right now, will not have another bout on that broadcast.

Good thing, Time Warner didn't merge with Enron. They'd be 'Six Feet Under'.