The New Year brings us hope for peace
A new day for boxing kind
Where we can all live hand in hand
And leave all the B.S. of boxing behind

The Coming Year

Corrales vs. Castillo III

Resident gluttons for punishment, Diego Corrales and Jose Luis Castillo, give us their third, modern-day version of Graziano-Zale when the duo meets once again February 4th. Say what you will, but a third fight with Castillo is all wrong for Corrales. Weight issues aside, Corrales persevered in the first fight thanks to his enormous heart and a little luck and these sorts of performances are hard to duplicate. Castillo will make weight without the assistance of an errant foot, and take out Corrales before round six, providing an anti-climatic finish to the trilogy.

James Toney vs. Hasim Rahman

Far removed from being the middleweight he once was, Toney's now an obese version of Bernard Hopkins, only unlike B-Hop, Toney scraps during his fights, fat and all. He's the same angry fighter he's been all along, with the same mad skills, and as one of the last remaining old-school fighters, he deserves a modicum of respect.

Forget the steroid controversy, the real question, in his biggest heavyweight test to date, is the fat man capable of conquering chronic underachiever Hasim Rahman, or will he end up on his backside like a beached whale? Rahman may be the first to shut Toney's trap, but as Big James is an anomaly, anything can happen. Regardless of how many coconut cream pies he eats, I wouldn't bet against him. Toney by UD12.

Floyd Mayweather vs. Zab Judah

On January 7, 2006, Zab "Super" Judah puts his WBC, WBA and IBF titles on the line against Carlos "Tata" Baldomir. Should Judah successfully defend his titles as expected, it sets up an April 8 meeting with Floyd "Pretty Boy" Mayweather.

Mayweather sits atop the pound for pound ratings with few others as deserving of the spot. A win over "Super" Judah would further solidify his position and set up a massive superfight with England's Ricky Hatton at 140.

But Pretty Boy may find Judah to be his most challenging opponent to date. He's the naturally bigger fighter, he can punch, he can box, and he can match Mayweather's speed. Plus he's a southpaw. Judah gave King Kostya all he could handle for a round until a well-paced punch

from Tszyu left him flopping around the ring like a catfish in a frying pan. His only other loss was to Corey Spinks which he avenged with a 9th round KO.

In what should be a thrilling and explosive tactical battle: Mayweather by a stunning, one punch fish-finder in the late rounds.

The Thai Elite

Ratanachai Sor Vorapin, Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai, Veeraphol Sahaprom and Pongsaklek Wonjongkam are certainly all among the top ten or twenty of the greatest Thai fighters of all-time and all have one thing in common; they're all closing in on the end of their careers.

Ratanachai Sor Vorapin

In the Mexico vs. Thailand World Cup promoted by Golden Boy Promotions, Sor Vorapin faced a hungry and vastly improved Jhonny Gonzalez. Sor Vorapin went into the bout as the prohibitive favorite and the most experienced fighter of the event with 73 fights under his belt. But in his last title defense against Mauricio Martinez, the 29-year-old veteran showed signs of fraying and narrowly escaped defeat.

The younger Jhonny Gonzalez came in off an impressive KO over William Gonzalez and showed from the start he deserved to be champion. From the outset Gonzalez controlled the bout, pounding Sor Vorapin into oblivion and knocking the Thai down three times before referee Robert Byrd stopped the carnage in round seven.

The bantamweight division has a plethora of talent and Sor Vorapin has a minefield of fighters lying ahead of him; unless he's given a gift fight against a weak titleholder, his days as a champion will remain a thing of the past.

Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai

When Yodsanan Sor Nanthachai put his title on the line against Vicente Mosquera of Panama, he hadn't fought for nine months. For many fighters, fighting once or twice a year may be enough; but Thai fighters tend to fight 4 or 5 times per year and need to stay active. Still, it came as a major shock to most when he dropped hard-fought decision in a war with Vicente Mosquera.

When you consider Sor Nanthachai hadn't lost in eleven years and Mosquera had never defeated anyone of any consequence, this was a huge upset. At 35, Yodsanan is fighting on borrowed time and has to move quickly. There have been talks of a fight against KO artist Edwin Valero, but this has yet to be confirmed by promoter Artie Petullo, and at least for now Sor Nanthachai will have to be content fighting tune-ups in Thailand until he can land a big fight.

Veeraphol Sahaprom

At 38, Sahaprom is also fighting on borrowed time. Early in 2005, after holding the WBA

bantamweight title for 6½ years, he dropped a close decision to Hozumi Hasegawa of Japan, losing his title in the process. Sahaprom has been on a mission since the loss, fighting every other month and winning four fights in a row. A rematch against Hasegawa would be ideal, and even at his ripe old age he'd stand a good chance of regaining the title from Hasegawa.

Pongsaklek Wonjongkam vs. Jorge Arce

The much anticipated bout between Wonjongkam, the long-reigning champion from Thailand, and Arce, the interim champion of Mexico, may actually come to pass this year. Rosendo Alvarez had been declared the mandatory challenger however; this was before Arce took the interim title. The WBC ordered negotiations to take place between the two, only to somehow quietly sweep the matter under the rug.

A Wonjongkam-Arce summit promises to be explosive should it take place. The shy and reserved Thai is the exact opposite of Travieso and their personalities match their fighting styles. Arce has excellent knockout power; Wonjongkam's power is good. Arce is free-swinging and at times wild; Wonjongkam is a masterful technician, content to use his considerable defensive skills to set up openings and force his opponent into making mistakes.

If Pongsaklek makes it out of the first four rounds, I'll go with the Thai via a close, unanimous decision. If Arce is focused – and especially if the fight is outside of Thailand – it could be the end of a long title run for Wonjongkam.

Poonsawat Kratingdaenggym

He's arguably the best of the best of the new-age Thai fighters. He's quick, he's fundamentally sound, he's got a decent chin, he's young and strong and he can whack a little. In another words, he's the total package. Look for him to defeat WBA champion Wladimir Sidorenko in 2006 in what will be the start of a lengthy reign.

Indonesian Rumble in the Jungle 2 – Chris John vs. Juan Manuel Marquez

On March 4, the WBA featherweight championship bout between former super champion Juan Manuel Marquez and regular champion Chris John will finally take place on Borneo Island, Indonesia. Originally scheduled for December 9th, the bout has been postponed twice due to a chronic and serious ankle injured suffered by John.

It's been a rough year for Marquez. First, The RING magazine's #1 featherweight and #5 pound for pound fighter was stripped by the IBF in August for failing to defend his title against mandatory challenger Fahprakorb Rakkiatgym. Then he was subsequently stripped of his WBA super championship. Not one promoter was willing to shell out the 50K purse bid minimum for Marquez to defend the title against the undeserving Rakkiatgym, not even his own promoter. So without declining the mandatory, or even setting foot in a ring, Marquez is now without a championship belt.

Aside from Chris John, though, not many dispute that Marquez is the best featherweight boxer

in the world. But he'll have to prove it against John for a paltry $30,000 and change in order to take back possession of the belt which was unjustly seized.

John is a gifted fighter and by no means a pushover. He's vastly underrated, underexposed and relatively unknown and unseen outside of Asia. Make no mistake about it, the Indonesian Thin Man can fight and will test Marquez. Pick-em...

Fantastic Filipino or Future Flop?

Rey Bautista

Filipino fans call Rey Bautista "Boom-Boom," and the heir to the throne now held by Manny Pacquiao. This may be expecting too much though, as he's still only a 19-year-old teenager. It may take another year or two, even three, to find and fill the weighty shoes now worn by the Pacman. He's yet to have faced any high-quality opposition with his best wins coming against undefeated Hengky Wuwungan of Indonesia, Tanzania's Obote Ameme and KO specialist Gerardo Espinoza of Mexico.

In his most recent bout against Gerardo Espinoza, Bautista was forced to climb off the canvas after being dropped in the second round. He went on to control the rest of the bout and win a close, unanimous eight round decision but he does have some flaws and will need some work. Bautista moves to 19-0 with 14 KO's while Espinoza drops his fifth fight in a row.

Fantasies and Farces

BRITISH heavyweight pretender Fraudley Audley Harrison will realize his limitations as a pugilist and decide to run for Prime Minister of England. He'll shock the world and win via the sympathy vote. Shortly thereafter he'll appoint Danny Williams as his right-hand man and "advisor."

The self-proclaimed, humble servant of boxing, El Presidente Jose Sulaiman, will follow the yellow brick road to the Emerald City for reasons only he knows. Along the way he'll befriend the Tin Man, the Scarecrow and the Cowardly Lion. Once in the Emerald City, he'll order the Scarecrow and Tin Man to pay the WBC a sanctioning fee. He'll then label the Cowardly Lion the "interim" champion and extract a sanctioning fee from him as well. As if this weren't enough, he'll find a rich midget who's never fought a day in his life, somehow rate him #3 in the world and then get him a title shot.

Sulaiman will also realize that regardless of what he may think about himself, or what sort of pompous front he creates, boxing doesn't need the WBC or him. He'll retire from boxing, fade from public scrutiny and become the owner of the largest pig farm in Mexico.

The WBA will once again add to its list of growing championships. Not only will they have regular and Super-Champions, they'll now add the "Super-Duper-Champion" title. A Super-Duper-Champion will be awarded to the fighter who pays the most sanctioning fees in a calendar year and a winning record will not be a prerequisite.

Question of the week

Where would boxing be without the WBC, WBA, IBF, WBO and every other alphabet organization?

Happy New Year and long live The Sweet Science!