

The Dog Days of Summer.

Written by Steve Kim

Wednesday, 20 August 2003 21:00

You know it's a slow week in boxing when- now hold on tightly while I say this- I talk at length about womens boxing. Yes, you heard correctly and I'll give a few seconds to get yourselves back on your feet and dust yourselves off, I know your all stunned.

Me talking about womens boxing is like Rush Limbaugh extolling the virtues of a Bill Clinton. Well, you may want to keep this column as a collectors item because trust me, it may not happen again.

It's not that I have anything against women or them boxing. It's just that I don't find it particularly entertaining. For me, there was never a novelty appeal, it was a sideshow that I would routinely side-step. It's like this, I'm a basketball fan but I don't watch the WNBA. No offense to the gals that shoot those deadly accurate set-shots and shoot a wide array of layups, but I want to see the best in the world ply their craft on the hardwood, which means guys like Kobe Bryant, Tim Duncan, Paul Pierce and Tracy McGrady not Lisa Leslie and.... well, quite frankly I don't know of anymore women hoopsters, like I said, I don't watch it.

But when Laila Ali and Christy Martin fight this upcoming weekend in Biloxi, Mississippi, it is arguably the most high profile fight for the month of August. Which says a lot about the two women and how promoters treat the late summer months. But there's no two ways about it, Ali and Martin have the center stage. There are no major bouts scheduled on either HBO or Showtime until mid-September when Oscar De La Hoya looks for revenge against Shane Mosley on HBO Pay-Per-View.

And if there are two female fighters that deserve the spotlight to themselves it's these two. And in many respects it's the old guard against the new upstart. You all remember Martin when she burst onto the scene in March of 1996 when she won an exciting six round decision against the tough Deidre Gogarty on the pay-per-view broadcast of Mike Tyson's easy win against Frank Bruno. She basically stole the show that night at the MGM Grand and with the promotional pull of Don King, she became the first superstar in womens boxing. It wasn't long before she was on the cover of Sports Illustrated, which nowadays does as much positive coverage on the sport as the AMA.

And she has had a successful career in almost every respect, except for not fighting Lucia Rijker, long considered the biggest threat to her throne, she has put together a string of victories over carefully chosen opposition and 'the Coal Miners Daughter' was for all intents and purposes the face of womens pugilism.

While Martin's prime was winding down, Ali's daughter was just getting started in the business. What looked at first to be something that couldn't be taken seriously, has actually turned into a serious and lucrative career. She has steadily improved her skills and more importantly, she has become an attraction. As it stands right now, Ali is the proverbial 'A'-side in this fight. It was her commercial appeal that made this promotion happen.

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And speaking of commercials, outside of a certain retired heavyweight pitchman that hawks his own grill on late night TV, what other fighter has national endorsement deals with companies like Cadillac and Dr. Pepper? Laila Ali, that's who. And that's not exactly 'Chico's Bail Bond's' sponsoring her, that's the big leagues.

Another feather in her cap is that she actually has a pay-per-view history, her scrap with Jacqui Frazier- yes, the daughter of 'Smokin' Joe'- did very well in 2001 and there's really no reason why this event shouldn't do just as good. The press conference melee that they got into awhile ago made national news- hey, maybe this womens boxing is becoming more and more like the men!!!- and as was mentioned above, it is the only game in town this week. For a suggested retail price of \$29.95, you can satisfy your 'Boxing Jones'.

But this point has to be made- for most of her career, Martin has fought around 140 to 147 pounds and she's no taller than 5'6. Ali, on the other hand is a statue-esque 5'10, 168 pounds. In other words, at their natural fighting weights there is at least a discrepancy of three weight classes. Did you happen to catch their little altercation at the press conference, it looked like Muggsy Bogues attempting to post-up Wilt Chamberlain. It just looked like a physical mismatch.

Such a disparity in weight in the mens game would not be allowed- and please don't even use the Roy Jones-John Ruiz fight as an example, your comparing apples to frozen oranges, there- and you wonder if Martin, who is past her prime will be competitive at all. Johnny McClain, the husband and promoter of Ali- now there's something you don't see and hear of everyday in this game- has carefully matched Ali with a roster of smallish, undersized women with little or no skill. Now, Martin definitely has skills but they are eroded to a certain degree and even on her tippy-toes would only come up to her opponents neck.

This could be a big event, but it's even bigger physical mismatch.

Do you remember when Laila's father went up against Larry Holmes in 1980 as a sacrificial lamb. Well, I think in this case, Martin plays the role of Muhammad Ali.

MEDIA DAY

I spent two days in Big Bear for the media days of both Oscar De La Hoya and Shane Mosley, staying over the night on Tuesday.

Neither fighter worked out a second for the gathered throng- forget about sparring, that seems taboo, now- but my question is this, if all the fighters are going to do is answer questions from the assembled media and not even shadow-box, how is that any different than a conference call.

I mean, other than the fact that in a conference call you can do it in the comfort of your own home with a simple telephone and not have to make the treacherous drive up to Big Bear and then pay for a hotel room and stuff.

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The level of paranoia of fighters has reached an absurd level. I know fighters want to keep their strategies and game plans secret, I understand that, but shouldn't experienced world-class fighters be able to just 'move around', as they say in the gym, with sparring partners in a public setting? After all, both Mosley and De La Hoya are world-class fighters who have gone through thousands of sparring sessions and trust me, they know how to carry guys or get through rounds by doing very little.

The least these guys could have done is shadow box a few rounds, hit the heavy bag and then hit the mitts. Guys, there really aren't any more secrets in this game and with the advent of video tape, you know what your opponents are bringing.

Seriously, you would have thought that by breaking a sweat in front of the media this past week that they were giving away nuclear secrets to the Chinese government or Al Queda.