Middleweights Super and Otherwise

Great Britain's Joe Calzaghe will have to wait a little longer to meet Peter Manfredo Jr. in defense of the WBO super middleweight title. The fight has been moved from March 3, 2007 to April 7, 2007. Because of scheduling conflicts for use of the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff, Wales, the promoters were forced to change the date for the much-anticipated showdown between WBO titleholder Calzaghe and Rhode Island's Manfredo of the Contender reality television show. Crowds have followed the promotion throughout the United Kingdom.

Speaking of middleweights, super or regular, Colombia's big punching Edison Miranda displays his talent against relatively unknown Willie Gibbs of Philadelphia. When it comes to middleweights, the unknown can be a very dangerous territory.

Miranda meets Gibbs on Saturday at the Miccosuke Resort and Gambling in Miami, Florida. The conflict will be televised on HBO's Boxing After Dark.

If Miranda proves anything, it's his willingness to meet all fellow 160-pounders with the democratic willingness of an executioner. Yes, that Executioner, the un-retired Bernard Hopkins. Though I'm sure his ability cannot be readily equated to the former middleweight king. It takes time to ferment that kind of product.

The Colombian's last meeting against WBO king Arthur Abraham, though not televised, did much to enhance his reputation as a talker and a walker in and out of the ropes, much like the future Hall of Fame candidate Hopkins. Now he faces another Philadelphia product, a place known for manufacturing middleweights as readily as cheese steak sandwiches.

Gibbs arrives with nothing more than the reputation of a town where middleweights flourish. Can anyone forget when Nicaragua's Ricardo Mayorga first ventured into the middleweight level on a world-class setting against Eric "Murder" Mitchell and discovered his fists couldn't break the middleweight's chin? It ended in a 10-round decision for Mayorga but it was plain to see that middleweights are the most dangerous of opponents in the world of prizefighting.

Need more proof?

Throughout boxing history middleweights have displayed the ability to crash a heavyweight's physical advantages with shocking results. Middleweight pugilists such as Stanley Ketchel, Joe Gans, Sam Langford, Archie Moore, Ezzard Charles and now Roy Jones Jr. and James Toney have proven that middleweights can and will beat much bigger heavyweights.

Few were surprised that Toney withstood the punches of the much bigger Samuel Peter back in September in a disputed split-decision. But many were surprised that Jones was able to capture the heavyweight title against John Ruiz several years ago.

Going back 100 years, Langford, a diminutive boxer who began as a welterweight, was able to convincingly beat men much larger than himself and even lasted 15 rounds against the great Jack Johnson. Langford regularly weighed about 156 pounds when he faced heavyweights. In one rare film clip Langford can be seen knocking out Fireman Jim Flynn in the eighth round of a fight that took place in the open stadium of Jeffries Arena in Vernon, California in 1910. He was visibly smaller than the heavyweight but caught the bigger man with a lightning combination almost undetectable in the grainy film.

Middleweights are the true backbone of prizefighting.

“They can hit like heavyweights and are as fast as featherweights,” is what HBO analyst Larry Merchant once said so succinctly.

On Saturday, Miranda faces Gibbs. Once more, middleweights take the forefront.

Three voted to Hall of Fame

Pernell “Sweet Pea” Whitaker, Roberto “Hands of Stone” Duran and Ricardo “Finito” Lopez were voted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame.

“This is bigger than any world title,” stated Whitaker in a press release.

Whitaker (40-4-1, 17 KOs) captured the lightweight, junior welterweight and welterweight world titles. He was known as a super quick defensive specialist.

Lopez (50-0-1, 38 KOs), of Mexico City, retired from the ring undefeated. He captured the WBC and WBA and WBO strawweight title and the IBF junior flyweight title. The only blemish on his career was a draw against Rosendo Alvarez. He beat him in the rematch. Lopez was known as a classic boxer with punching power.

Duran (103-16, 70 KOs) was recently inducted into the World Boxing Hall of Fame in California and is now voted into the New York-based International Boxing Hall of Fame.

Christmas Toy Drive

The Terry Claybon Foundation is sponsoring the 10th annual Holiday Party and Toy Drive fundraiser for impoverished children of South Central Los Angeles. Claybon owns the LB4LB Boxing Gym and trains Damian “Bolo” Wills among others in the Los Angeles area.

Those people wishing to attend the fundraiser and party must bring a toy worth $20 or money. The event takes place on Dec. 15 at the Henry Fonda Theater located at 6126 Hollywood Blvd. in Hollywood. It begins at 9 p.m. and ends at 2 a.m. For more information call (323) 525-0120.

Open scorecards

For the first time in television history the scorecards were read during the middleweight world

championship between Jermain Taylor and Kassim Ouma. The new WBC rules allow that scorecards of the three judges will be read in the fourth and eighth rounds.

“I think it’s a horrible idea,” said Marty Denkin, a judge with the California Athletic Commission. “If a fighter knows he’s ahead then he can coast the rest of the way. We’ll have a lot of dull fights.”

The new ruling was made in light of the recent spate of bad judgments, in particular the fight between James Toney and Samuel Peter in Los Angeles by out-of-town judges that gave the win to Peter. Because most of the boxing journalists saw Toney the winner, the WBC ordered a rematch. Toney and Peter are set to meet again on Jan. 6 in Hollywood, Florida.

Joan Guzman fights on Monday

Don’t miss one of boxing’s least known but more talented prizefighters when Joan Guzman (26-0) defends his WBO junior lightweight title against Antonio Davis (22-2) on Monday.

The fight takes place on Guzman’s homeland the Dominican Republic on Monday and can be viewed on Maxboxing.com for a purchase price of $9.95 or $12.95 if you wait until Monday. It begins at 6 p.m. Pacific Time and 9 p.m. Eastern Time.

Guzman is a rare talent. Until you actually see the flashy Dominican live, it’s hard to describe all of his boxing tools because he has them all. He’s a combination of a young Shane Mosley and Mark “Too Sharp” Johnson. It’s too bad he’s already 30 years old.

How good is Guzman? If anyone can match Manny Pacquiao face-to-face it’s the lightning-fisted Guzman. Now that would be a match worth seeing.

Christmas gift

Famed boxing writer Tim Dahlberg’s book “Fight Town: Las Vegas—The Boxing Capitol of the World,” is available for purchase. It contains 228 pages of historic boxing matches that took place in Las Vegas from the 1950s to the present. The book can be bought on the Internet at www.fighttownvegas.com