

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH BOXING?

Written by Jose Torres

Sunday, 15 September 2002 18:00

I have always assumed that no stupid person can ever reach the top of any profession. In boxing, what separates a champion from ordinary boxers is precisely the mental ability to produce immediate tactic and strategy while in the line of fire.

It's convenient for the reader to understand that the attacks, as well as the evasions, of a champ or top contender are, for the most part, clever moves created consciously or subconsciously by a combination of instinct and calculated but instant conception of inconceivable proportions.

All this, of course, is only applicable to serious prizefighters. For among them there is an emotional and psychological strength that never ceases to come to their aid. Soon enough, the people who want to learn about boxing will discover that every champion possesses those gifts, and that championship crowns are won neither by accident nor by chance. Exceptions to this rule can be counted on the fingers of a single hand.

With that concept pasted all over the walls of my brain, I couldn't just look the other way when I heard a few days ago a ridiculous comment made by the undisputed world's heavyweight champ Lennox Lewis, in a vain effort to justify his decision to relinquish his International Boxing Federation (IBF) championship belt.

Renouncing a mandatory fight against IBF's number-one contender, Chris Byrd, Lewis said that:

"Today, I announce my decision to give up my IBF crown. My team and I have determined that there is no public interest in a bout between Lennox Lewis and Chris Byrd." He also said that Byrd couldn't offer him a competitive challenge and that "only a champ makes the crown important, not the other way around."

It sounded strange to me that a boxer who became champion only because the then champ, Riddick Bowe, dropped his championship belt inside a trash can in anger, proclaim all of a sudden his refusal to defend his title simply because the IBF's number-one challenger lacks quality.

To begin with, it's absurd for a boxing champ to refuse a legitimate and mandatory match just because his rival doesn't possess the competitive quality of a good pugilist.

The paradox seems brutal when one discovers that those words came from a prizefighter. For one is supposed to know that professional boxing is a business where good managers know that they are not in it to produce heroes or super-machos, but to develop champions and make money for them.

"It was Emmanuel Steward (Lewis' Trainer) the reason why Lennox Lewis doesn't want to fight me," Chris Byrd screamed to the world. "Emmanuel is the one who knows that my style would make life impossible for Lewis inside a boxing ring. Lennox is not going to touch me and Emmanuel knows that. He also knows that I'm not going to stand in front of him and make

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myself available to be hit.”

Indeed, knowing that Lennox had never looked dim-witted to me, especially inside the four ropes, I started to search and research for the place where this “lament” of relinquishing his IBF heavyweight crown had come from. Pretty soon I had the pleasure of sighing with delight.

I discovered that Don King, boxing’s most “astute” negotiator, had decided to provide a gift of \$1 million and a Range Rover automobile to the undisputed heavyweight king, to cover any emotional discomfort that the champ could have suffered from giving up the IBF championship belt.

No one can accuse King’s gifts of having anything to do with Lewis’ harsh decision. But the boxing world is very much aware that the aggressive promoter, like a magician from another planet, already has sensational future boxing cards that include:

1. Lennox Lewis versus Vladimir Klitschko
2. Chris Byrd versus Evander Holyfield
3. John Ruiz versus Roy Jones, Jr.

Looking at such possibilities, anyone who knows and understands this immature business -from the prizefighter point of view- of pugilism, may think that there will be no losers in that program. But everyone would suspect that the one extracting the most gold from all that confusion and manipulation would be none other than Mr. Don King.

The spectacular promoter will again be in control of the heavyweights in professional boxing -the dream of every promoter- showing us all that he’s still in charge of the perspicacity that has characterized him all throughout his boxing career.

However, if we are lucky, and by the time King’s maneuvers have subsided, all mediums and boxing fans, should claim from the astute promoter and the TV media involved in fight promotions, to start complying with the full disclosure clause which stipulates the airing of all fight income, as demanded by the Muhammad Ali Bill, an active Federal law for almost two years now. I wouldn’t mind seeing in black and white all the earnings received by everyone involved in boxing promotions including the promoter, sanctioning organization, cable TV, boxing commission... and also an explanation of the role they played in it.

Although promoter Bob Arum told me recently that as a promoter he divulges all the numbers in writing after each promotion, I’ve never heard or seen such generosity from anyone, except prizefighters. We all know the income of a boxer, and what they do to earn it. It would be of great delight to many of us to see how the money produced by the sweat and blood of prizefighters is shared in their business.

When one looks at the consequence of conditions like those mentioned in this article, one has to realize that the prizefighter has no voice and no vote in the business he produces. For without boxers, there will be no boxing business. And as it is, the boxer is abused and treated as a second-class citizen in his own terrain.

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As such there is only one route left for the prizefighter to take: A Union! They would then have their own powerhouse!

The Boxers Organizing Committee (BOC) has been working on that for over ten years, under the magnificent leadership of Paul Johnson, from Minnesota. I've been advising him for the last three years. Boxing fans should get together and scream to the world that boxers must unite and demand their rights to become a collective force, just like the baseball, basketball and soccer players, as well as movie actors, and most working people in this country.

After all, prizefighting is one of the most popular sports in the USA. So that to demand equality for prizefighters in the sports world is not only a right, but an obligation.

We shouldn't wait any longer. We must do it now!