

A Plea To The Casual Fan

Written by Mike Lynch

Thursday, 06 December 2007 19:00

Now, a plea to the casual fan:

Tonight's "Undefeated" card caps an unbelievable run of fall fights. Pitting two undefeated stars, including the #1 pound-for-pound pugilist, makes this a logical terminus to the stretch, which has hopefully breathed fresh life into the sport.

The bottom line is that we enter 2008 with even more mouth-watering match-ups promised. And perhaps the biggest victory of the year has been the willingness of Top Rank and Golden Boy to make the right fights happen, come hell or high water.

Boxing fans know this. And we are excited that the sweet science is trending in the right direction, with old beefs left behind.

However, prepare yourself for possibly another mainstream backlash. We've all been there before. It's that week or month of the year that boxing enters news cycle. And the authority tells us what's wrong with our sport. Soon enough, they go back to acting as if boxing doesn't exist anymore.

But now we have another "name" fight. Since defeating and "retiring" (in the Jay-Z sense, at least) Oscar De La Hoya, Floyd Mayweather, Jr. has become the most visible active American boxing champion. His bout with Oscar was a marketing blockbuster, but an athletic bomb.

The millions that were watching their 1st fight in years (or ever) were disappointed with the posturing juxtaposed against the inactivity. If they had watched the Pretty Boy, full of bluster on 24/7, dance the night away like he was auditioning for Tom Bergeron, they were perturbed. There was some WWE levels of false-bravado going on there.

And that's the problem with PBF becoming boxing's name brand product in the American media. A casual fan is not going to appreciate PBF's subtle ring mastery and defensive tactics. Rather, they see a small man with a big mouth, the Napoleonic type that drives them nuts on a daily basis.

There is a reason that PBF is not popular with fight fans. He's neither loved nor feared. His skills are respected, and even marveled at, but he rarely if ever brings the fight. Similarly, he is smart to always fight opponents with large independent followings. Subsequently, his fights inevitably have plenty of fan interest. And he becomes a big name by proxy. And by simply winning. Often in the most passive style possible. Always posturing as if he's so cool and collected that he's going to beat his opponent without even throwing a punch.

Against Oscar, people tuned in and were turned off. And the shame of it is that they missed some tremendous fights. Kelly Pavlik/Jermain Taylor was arguably the most exciting sporting event, let alone boxing match, that I have seen all year.

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Calzaghe/Kessler was more than a showdown. The massive crowd made it feel larger than life. And to the 50,000 plus in attendance, it was. Watching on my TV at home, I could not help but get caught up in the moment. At times, I felt like I was watching a fight from ages ago on an old newsreel.

But for casual American fans, directed by their safe American media outlets, PBF is the name they know. He's ranked #1 P4P and he's the over the top ego with the reality shows and the Dancing with the Stars cameos.

People often are not willing to devote themselves in whole to anything. We inhabit a world with an unnatural and unhealthy number of options. If you have the money, you have the means to watch over 1000 television channels. You can read articles on millions of websites (and thank you for choosing this one). But what people tend to do, is sample the perceived "best."

But the "best" is rarely what conventional wisdom says is the best.

People will watch this fight out of curiosity and under the assumption that they are tuning in for the best fight since May. If PBF dances around Hatton, they may well be turned off once again. They will then miss a whole string of amazing bouts. They will pay no mind to them, since in their own minds they have seen the best the sport has to offer. And, to them, it wasn't enough.

I equate this to the general consensus I hear on the NBA. People tune in for the Finals and it is inevitably a boring, slow-down style. Exciting plays are limited, because such plays come from risk-taking maneuvers and players free-lancing outside of set plays.

But defense, in boxing and basketball, wins championships.

A sound defense is structured and plays it safe. Just like our lives that we are seeking temporary escape from when we watch sports.

Therefore, I call on the casual fan to watch the flawed fighters! Watch the basketball team that plays no defense! These are the match-ups where the unbelievable will happen.

Consume something that isn't prepackaged for your dissatisfaction.

Just don't tell me that you watched Floyd Mayweather, Jr. dance for 12 rounds and weren't impressed. After all, aren't you the same John Neilsen that was watching him on "Dancing with the Stars?"