We drove into Las Vegas around 3 p.m. on Thursday and headed straight for the MGM Grand to get whiff of the atmosphere. It was clear and sunny in California but cool and gray when we arrived in the desert gambling Mecca.

As soon as we walked into the lobby area of the hotel where a boxing ring is erected, there were Brits everywhere just mulling around. Toward the bar area by the elevators were even more Englishmen drinking away and looking at anyone who headed into the darker liquor buying area. Right near the entrance were a few boxing people like Joe Chavez the cut man and several British fighters on their way to the weigh in I guess.

This is boxing at it's best with thousands willing to travel over 6,000 miles to see their guy in Las Vegas fight the Pound for Pound best.

The media room was located in the same place as usual near the entrance of the MGM Garden Arena where the Floyd Mayweather-Ricky Hatton fight is going to take place in about two days. We obtain our media credentials and head toward the pressroom. The place was packed with media especially the British press.

About 16 radio stations line the west and north side of the giant media room where elite boxers like Bernard Hopkins, Shane Mosley, Ricky Hatton and Oscar De La Hoya are talking about the upcoming fight.

I picked up the bout sheets for Friday and Saturday's fight I noticed that both nights had more than eight fights on each day. That means an early start time especially for Friday's fights with the man fight involving a rematch between Enrique Ornelas and Bronco McKart in a middleweight showdown. The fight is televised by Telefutura so that means a 4:30 p.m. start.

Golden Boy Promotions invited me to a dinner later that night. I've been to a few of these types of dinners and I'm not the type who talks a lot so I leave early. But on this occasion I invited a friend who lives in Las Vegas a female fighter named Elena "Baby Doll" Reid, who is the undisputed flyweight champion of the world. She has always wanted to meet Oscar De La Hoya and Shane Mosley.

The dinner is held in one of the studios below the MGM Garden Arena with most of the newspaper boxing writers on hand like Chuck Johnson of USA Today, Steve Spring and Lance Pugmire of the L.A. Times, Tim Smith of New York Daily News, George Willis of New York Post and a few low-rungs like me. One by one the Golden Boy fighters begin arriving into the host area where drinks are passed out. Holding court is PR extraordinaire Bill Caplan, his daughter Debbie Caplan. Monica Sears and Nicole Becerra of Golden Boy are also there greeting the writers to the affair.

Elena Reid and myself stand in a corner and watch the people arrive. As De La Hoya arrives a

group of writers descend on him like flies to a bright light. After about 20 minutes the writers begin to filter out. Next comes Shane Mosley who arrives with his wife Jin.

Elena Reid finally meets Oscar and Shane and they talk about boxing. Both male champions comment on how she doesn't look like a fighter let alone a world champion. She adds that she's now going to enter MMA and they're both amazed. She's very spunky.

During the dinner Golden Boy CEO Richard Schaefer discusses the reasons they made the dinner and asked that all the professional fighters in the room stand up. Up goes De La Hoya, Mosley, Bernard Hopkins, Juan Manuel Marquez and Elena Reid.

Elena Reid?

I tell you she's spunky.

After the dinner more than a few people approach Elena to ask about her pro career. It's kind of a tragic truth that though many people like women's boxing, few promoters are willing to put the money to stage a show. Reid has been fighting for eight years and hasn't made more than $70,000 total despite 27 pro bouts. Plus she's a world champion.

Bernard Hopkins drops by to say hello and shares a few stories of his life. He talks about getting in a fistfight about two weeks before his big bout with Oscar De La Hoya. The Philadelphia boxer said he contracted this guy who stands about 6-7 and weighs 400 pounds to do some work on his home. The guy tries to jack him and Hopkins and the giant come to blows. Hopkins smacks him with one of his patented right hands and the big galoot falls forward right on Hopkins. He can't get up. He's fretting because the guy is so big that he feels he might be in trouble when the guy regains consciousness. After struggling Hopkins finally gets the lug off him. But it was a close call he says.

Caplan laughs because he can't believe this all happened just before the biggest moneymaking fight of Hopkins's career.

"I'm from the streets," said Hopkins.

Friday

We arrive around noon so we can get some free grub. The place is packed with journalists. Just walking from the parking lot to the media center takes about 20 minutes. Inside the media room there are boxing people flooding every crevice but outside the room there are literally thousands of people.

As we sat munching on a few desserts a regular-looking guy dressed in a grayish blue pullover shirt, jeans and tennis shoes and not wearing socks is being guided by p.r. specialist Debbie Caplan. We take a closer look at the almost anonymous guy and he sure looks like Joe Calzaghe. He's led to one of the radio booths for an interview. No one notices but myself and two others in this room filled with more than 100 journalists. Then after his interview he turns to

face the giant room and all bedlam breaks loose.

“It’s Joe Calzaghe,” shouts one British writer.

About 50 people gather around him asking questions and then Bernard Hopkins lopes over to get a look. While he’s there he mugs Calzaghe and begins telling him about his future. Both fighters stand toe-to-toe and don’t move an

We continue eating and looking at the British journalists jumping on each other’s back to talk to Calzaghe.

Around 2:30 p.m. we head to the weigh-in. Once we walk into the arena we hear and see thousands of mostly British fans singing songs about their hero Rick Hatton. It’s a pretty amazing scene. This is what boxing is all about.

During introductions the crowd cheers loudly for Shane Mosley who bows graciously to the fans. Then Juan Manuel Marquez is introduced and the crowd applauds politely. Oscar De La Hoya is introduced and the crowd cheers loudly once again. Marco Antonio Barrera is announced and the crowd cheers loud for Hatton’s buddy. Then Hopkins is announced and boos cascade from the deepest regions of the arena. He eggs on the boos. Then Joe Calzaghe is announced and the crowd roars its loudest and begins singing a “Joe Calzaghe song” in unison. It’s pretty awe-inspiring. Hopkins motions with a throat cutting gesture and Calzaghe responds back. The crowd is delirious.

After the weigh-ins we walk to the convention center area where a large fight card called “The U.K. vs. the world” is going to take place. About 1,000 maybe 1,500 people show up in a spacious place. I’m sitting about 10 rows back so that I can get some electricity for my laptop. It never comes.

The fights are entertaining and feature mostly British fighters against so-so American or Mexican fighters.

A group of Brits walk into my row, I’m the only guy sitting in it, and ask if they can join me. I say of course and make room for them. We casually talk about the fights going on. Later one of the p.r. people comes by and says to the guy sitting next to me “are you OK Mr. Hatton.”

I do a double take. Sure enough it’s Ricky Hatton’s pop.

We’re watching Karl Dargan one of the American boxers but it looks like he’s trying too hard. He wins but it easy a smooth drive for the former amateur standout making his pro debut.

Mr. Hatton knows boxing and comments here and there. He especially looks at Scotland’s Craig McEwan and says the young middleweight doesn’t sit on his punches. “He would have taken the guy out with that one,” Hatton says. “Or maybe not. The other fellow looks durable.”

Hatton and his friends comment on Freddie Roach’s great training ability. The British from

Manchester or very congenial fellows with a lot of class. Just like Ricky Hatton.

After the fight cards we met some old boxing friends Steve and Michele Harpst and joined some other of our boxing crew Big Joe Miranda of Fightnews and famous cornerman Tony Rivera. We go to eat but Tony has to go somewhere else. While eating we see the circus pass by as people from everywhere walk pass our table.

It was a long, long day.

Saturday

We arrive back at the MGM for a press conference with Miguel Cotto and Top Rank's Bob Arum. It's Arum's birthday. Everybody cheers the promoter who is now 76.

Cotto is in a cheerful mood and everybody gets a chance to talk with him. In private I ask him if he had any tricks up his sleeve when he fought Shane Mosley. He said he only resorted back to his earlier days when he boxed more and slugged less. Plus he had two other back up plans. He added that he needed the back up plans.

The great Puerto Rican world champion would love a match with Oscar De La Hoya and so would Arum, but both know it's Oscar's last hurrah and he deserves a much easier match if that's possible.

Cotto also says that "Floyd Mayweather would never fight me. He knows who the real world champion is."

Arum says that if Mayweather won't fight Cotto why not Shane Mosley?

"I would love to see Mayweather fight Shane Mosley and he's not even my fighter," Arum said.

The fights began at 3:15 and several young fighters make their mark including Danny Garcia and Daniel Jacobs. Matthew Hatton wins a tough one too in his welterweight title. I met the younger Hatton days earlier and he's a good guy. He's also pretty hilarious.

During the singing of the U.S. National anthem the crowd boos loudly throughout as Tyrese sings. But through the boos I can hear many in the audience begin to sing. I've seldom heard the audience sing the National Anthem before a fight. It goes to show that boxing brings Americans together.

Floyd Mayweather then proceeds to beat up Hatton with the help of referee Joe Cortez. Not that he needed any help, but Cortez was giving it to him anyway in my estimation. Mayweather was elbowing and roughhousing like Hatton was expected to do. Cortez put the shackles on the wrong guy.

After filing a story for the Riverside Press-Enterprise and another to www.TheSweetScience.com on deadline, I'm ready to head home. It's around midnight but I still

have to pick up my sister. By the time I'm headed toward California it's 1 a.m.. We reach our destination around 4 a.m.

Other notes

Super middleweight world champion Joe Calzaghe has agreed to meet light heavyweight world champion Bernard Hopkins and was present at the fight in Las Vegas last Saturday. While there both Calzaghe and Hopkins pressed noses while attempting to intimidate each other. "No way he beats me" said Hopkins loudly inside the media center at the MGM Grand. Calzaghe merely laughed. "I never knew I had so many supporters among Ricky Hatton fans," said Calzaghe who was cheered in song by the many British fans in Las Vegas. The fight between Calzaghe and Hopkins is scheduled for Las Vegas or New York City.

Former 2000 U.S. Olympian Jose Navarro of Los Angeles will meet WBO junior bantamweight titleholder Fernando Montiel on Feb. 16 in Las Vegas. The fight will be the semi-main event under the Kelly Pavlik and Jermain Taylor middleweight championship fight. Navarro has been out-pointed in three previous world title bids and hopes this will be the lucky fight. Montiel fights out of Los Mochis, Mexico.

Ulises Solis (25-1-2, 19 KOs) defends his IBF junior flyweight title against Filipino Bert "Ninja" Batawang (50-6, 34 KOs) at Guadalajara, Mexico on Saturday Dec. 15. The fight will not be televised. Solis is a marked man. It's the second consecutive time he defends his title against a Filipino. In his last fight he barely escaped with a win against Filipino Rodel Mayol by eighth round knockout.