

My 2008 Wish List

Written by Robert Mladinich
Saturday, 15 December 2007 19:00

The good news for boxing fans in 2007 was that we were treated to more competitive matchups than we've seen in recent years.

With the January 2008 battle between Roy Jones Jr. and Felix Trinidad coming five years too late, we should be grateful that we saw such compelling bouts as Jermain Taylor-Kelly Pavlik, Joe Calzaghe-Mikkel Kessler, Miguel Cotto-Shane Mosley, and Floyd Mayweather versus a prime Ricky Hatton and a still competitive Oscar De La Hoya this year.

While De La Hoya, Cotto and Mosley have always been willing to fight the best available challengers, the same cannot be said for many other champions and contenders.

The fact that there were so many good fights this year had more to do with the imminent threat posed by ultimate fighting and mixed martial arts than anything else. Promoters, as well as fighters, realize that if they don't start presenting good product fans now have somewhere else to turn.

The bad news is that just about all the top-shelf bouts are on pay-per-view. HBO has gotten in the habit of building fighters like Cotto, Taylor or Pavlik on their network, just so they can turn them into pay-per-view commodities.

Many fans, me included, complain about this practice and vow to not support it by refusing to purchase questionable matchups. In the end, my lack of willpower usually comes forth and I end up ordering at the last minute.

While I assure you I won't be purchasing Jones-Trinidad, I have assembled a list of important fights that, if all was fair, should be made in 2008.

Wladimir Klitschko-Sultan Ibragimov: Although I am not totally sold on the fact that the 6'6" Klitschko, 49-3 (44 KOs), is the savior of the heavyweight division, he is the IBF champion and seems genuinely interested in unifying the titles.

What will likely prevent that from happening is that in order to do so he would have to give at least partial future options to Don King, who represents WBC interim champion Samuel Peter.

Chances are that King also owns a piece of WBA titlist Ruslan Chagaev because Chagaev defeated the 7'0 Russian giant Nikolai Valuev for the crown. Valuev had a promotional agreement with King.

Klitschko has stated that he will not do business with King, so if he beats WBO champion Ibragimov, 22-0-1 (17 KOs), in February at Madison Square Garden, it will at least prove to the public that he is trying to do the right thing.

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Anything that can help the moribund heavyweight division is good. What makes the fight somewhat interesting is that although Klitschko has huge physical advantages over the much shorter and lighter Ibragimov, he doesn't have the greatest chin and has already proven himself to be susceptible to speedy southpaws.

It wasn't that long ago that lefty South African Corrie Sanders rocked Klitschko's world by shockingly stopping him in the second round.

Joe Calzaghe-Kelly Pavlik: If Pavlik, the universally regarded middleweight champion with a 32-0 (29 KOs) record, gets past Jermain Taylor in their February rematch, a fight with Calzaghe, 44-0 (32 KOs), who owns multiple super middleweight crowns, would be a wonderful encore.

Although Calzaghe is a non-stop punching machine, he is also one of the best pure boxers in the game. Pavlik, on the other hand, is a bone-crunching bomber who can change the course of a fight at any time.

The long and lean Pavlik will only get bigger and stronger, so the time should be right for him to go after boxing's longest reigning champion.

Kelly Pavlik-John Duddy: This would probably be the bloodiest television event of the year. If Pavlik chooses to continue fighting at middleweight, a fight against the popular Irishman would be a natural.

As pleasant and unassuming as both fighters are outside of the ring, they are offensive animals inside of it. Heads would be snapping, blood would be splashing, and neither fighter would take a backwards step.

Duddy's cut man, the 6'8", 280 pound "Big" George Mitchell, says that a Pavlik-Duddy fight would be no less exciting than Marvin Hagler-Thomas Hearn. There's a good chance that, for as long as it lasted, it might even be more exciting.

Juan Diaz-David Diaz: On paper this fight is not particularly titillating, but it would be significant for a number of reasons. The only fighter preventing Juan, who is nicknamed "The Baby Bull," from holding all of the major lightweight titles is David, 33-1-1 (17 KOs), who holds the WBC crown.

The other obstacle is Don King, with whom Juan is currently embroiled in promotional entanglements.

If Juan wins, he would not only be a unified champion, he would remind us of many of the reasons why we like boxing and boxers in the first place. The Baby Bull is not only a pre-law college student with a 33-0 (17 KOs) record, he has evolved into one of the most thrilling television fighters in the game.

Although previously known as a distance fighter, he stopped two hard-to-stop champions, Acelino Freitas and Julio Diaz, in tremendous fashion in 2007.

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David, who is coming off a victory over Erik Morales, is also good for the game. As gentlemanly as both fighters are, they are also iron-willed Mexican-American warriors who know how to please the crowd.

Floyd Mayweather Jr.-Paul Williams: No one really believes that the 5'8" Mayweather, 39-0 (25 KOs) is really going to retire, do they? If he chooses not to, which I assure you will be the case, a fight against 6'1" undefeated southpaw power-puncher Paul "The Punisher" Williams, 33-0 (24 KOs) would be akin to the first epic encounter between Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns in the early eighties.

Could Mayweather, who would be cast as the modern day Leonard, utilize his superior ring generalship to edge out or even stop the steely-eyed, offensive-minded Williams?

To his credit, Mayweather seems to take all of his opponents seriously. It would be interesting to see how he handles a taller, equally confident onrushing foe with a ramrod jab and power to spare.

Floyd Mayweather Jr.-Miguel Cotto: Until Cotto 31-0 (25 KOs), beat Shane Mosley in his most recent outing, he was considered by many to be a one dimensional brawler. Against Sugar Shane, he changed up his style a few times to show that he's a thinking man's brawler.

An argument could be made that Cotto would be tailor made for Mayweather. A lot of people, especially the thousands upon thousands of maniacal Cotto fans who would show up for the fight, regardless of where it was held, would disagree with that assessment.

There's only one way to find out the truth. Let's get it on.