

Buying Saturday's PPV Or Giving It A Pass?

Written by Michael Woods

Sunday, 30 November 2008 19:00

Sometimes it stinks to be a fight fan, doesn't it?

We can handle loving an "outlaw" sport, the occasional snooty glances from disapproving relatives and acquaintances who wonder why we so enjoy a "barbaric" spectacle. We are judged to be bloodthirsty voyeurs at worst, or simply anachronisms, relics from another less evolved era.

But we know what we like, we enjoy the spectacle, and skill, and showcases of strength and will and heart, and we can shrug off the judgments. But when that cable bill comes, that can be harder to shrug off, right?

It's one thing to hear chops busting, but quite another to get that bill three weeks after you broke down, and ordered that pay per view, and see a bill that is 50% larger than it would be. Everything it seems, has gone up in cost, but unless you are in the fortunate minority, your salary or hourly wage hasn't kept pace.

But if you want to be in the mix, and truly follow the sweet science, you are resigned to pony up that extra \$50 a month, on top of the extra spiff you pay to subscribe to the premium channels, HBO and Showtime, which are the primary homes to the outlaw sport which advertisers are reluctant to touch. Or so we've been lead to believe, right?

So then how has Golden Boy been able to secure financing from advertisers which will allow those inclined to purchase Saturday's Oscar De La Hoya/Manny Pacquiao pay per view for less than the \$54.95 suggested retail price?

Coca-Cola and Tecate beer are offering mail-in rebate coupons worth \$20 each toward the cost of the pay-per-view telecast, and Cazadores tequila will offer a \$10 rebate. Do the math, then. If you get your stuff together, you can stock up on items for your guests on Saturday, and defray the expense. If you are frugal and deceitful, you could even not tell your guests about the coupons, charge them Saturday night, and MAKE A PROFIT. Not that TSS condones that sort of thing!

"We know these are tough times economically," Schaefer said about the coupons. "With the help of these rebates, which we think is unprecedented in pay per view, more fans will be able to afford to see this great event."

Rebate coupons can be found on six-packs of Coke's Full Throttle energy drink and 18-packs of Tecate beer.

Why aren't other promoters able to pull off the same sort of promotional tie ins? Why do fight fans take it on the chin, and have to pony up \$50 a month to effectively follow fightsports, or more if you also watch MMA? Will the economic downturn force promoters and programmers

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to...say it isn't so?...actually leave a few dollars on the table, and back off the business model that hammers consumers? Will they finally finally finally get it that they aren't growing new fans by putting the most attractive bouts on premium channels and on PPV? Further, do they care, or are they simply interested in squeezing every last ounce of blood from the turnip, and could care less about the longterm prospects of the industry?

We get accused of being terminal naysayers sometimes, but let it be clear that I applaud Golden Boy CEO Richard Schaefer's effort and Golden Boy and Top Rank's decision to put the January 24 Margarito-Mosley bout on regular HBO. That's a sign of comprehension that the powerbrokers need to back off on the PPV pile on, and concede that the pockets of their diehards are bottomless pits. Now, when Schaefer or whoever has the foresight and wherewithal to place a premium fight on regular network TV, maybe on a Saturday night, where MMA has had success, then you'll be able to hear the sounds of me clapping in Brooklyn all the way in California...

Schaefer and Top Rank boss Bob Arum hopped on a conference call on Monday afternoon to hype the Saturday match, which is either a cynical exercise in money gathering, or a genuinely fascinating match of styles that could result in a history-making upset of the larger man at the hands of the smaller man with the heart of a lion.

The economy, or lack thereof, was a popular reference point on the call. Schaefer particularly, being a banker in his former life, was impressive in his grasp of the national monetary mood, and in his ability to convey it to us keyboard tappers whose degrees make us more suited for watching sporting events and commenting on them than weighing in on matters like gross domestic product and collateralized debt obligations. Over a year ago, Schaefer reminded us, he sounded warning bells on the economy. But today, he said there were some encouraging signs, in the markets, gas prices, retail sales, and entertainment purchase trends. OK, so today actually the Dow tanked like Pavlik at middleweight, but he had us convinced there for the time being...

Back to that cable bill, and the price tag for Saturday's presentation. Arum said that people should take a page from the Hispanics and Filipinos, who he said gather together groups of people to defray the cost of the event. "Four couples, bring beer, tacos, order Dominos pizza, it's cheaper than going to the movies and getting a bite to eat after," Arum said. "I'm very bullish on how this pay per view is going to do."

In fact, in these leaner times, Arum is still hopeful that the numbers from PPV will surpass the numbers for Oscar/Floyd in 2007, and preliminary indications are that is the case, he said. Of reports that tickets sales aren't as robust as he might like, he acknowledged that some tix are still available, but that they moved almost \$15 million in an hour upon initial release, so he wouldn't have lowered prices if he'd known four months ago that the economy would be in this state. Maybe, Arum said, he would've voted to lower the PPV cost five bucks. That would've been a nice gesture, at least, in TSS' mind...He also refused to shed a tear for ticket brokers, who snapped up a lion's share of the tickets, and will be stuck selling a big batch at face value.

The two men also touched on the history of bad blood between Top Rank and Golden Boy,

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which boiled over last year when Pacquiao signed with both companies before deciding to stick with Arum. Since then, they've co-promoted Barrera-Pacquiao, Mosley-Cotto, Hopkins-Pavlik and will do Mosley-Margarito next year, so clearly money has helped the principals get over their beef. Schaefer said that De La Hoya is still miffed at Manny for his dealings, and got in a shot at Pacquiao when he said, "Manny has the ability to attract chaos." Oscar, Schaefer said, "has said more than once that he will make Manny pay."

Arum contends that he feels strongly that PacMan could win this fight, as does his trainer, and Top Rank matchmakers. He would not put his man in an unwinnable bout, he said. So that spoke to fans and media who think this event is a mismatch. Arum and Schaefer both ascribe much of that negativism to jealousy from promoters and fighters, but didn't address what would make a fan take this stance...

Schaefer also said that he and Oscar regularly discuss "the end," and that one never knows, Dec. 6 could be Oscar's last fight. I cannot guarantee that this will not be Oscar's farewell, but the man is going to see a 14 foot statue of himself erected at the Staples Center, next to statues of Magic Johnson and Wayne Gretzky, so I can think we can agree his work is done if he so chooses...

Now, TSS Universe, I want to hear from you. Will you be buying the PPV, or taking a pass? Is that because you perceive it to be a mismatch? Is it too pricy? Have you cut back on your PPV purchases in recent months? Or do you simply accept that this is the business model for the sport, and are resigned to shell out premium money for premium product? Weigh in!