Mostly invisible to the boxing public are those men and women wearing blue or light green that often have an impact on the sport greater than a Manny Pacquiao or Kelly Pavlik punch.

Judges and referees can dictate judiciously or acrimoniously against a prizefighter that can have severe consequences for that fighter's remaining career.

In recent years some horrible decisions have surfaced like the Jose Armando Santa Cruz fight that went to Joel Casamayor. Or the Felix Trinidad and Oscar De La Hoya clash that most experts feel was incorrectly given to Tito. And there are referee's actions that can determine the winner such as the Mariana Juarez fight against Myung Ok Ryu. In that world title fight in North Korea both fighters were swapping punches with the Mexican fighter getting the edge. Suddenly, the referee stops the action and raises the hand of Ryu to the glee of the North Korean crowd but to the horror of Juarez and her assistants. And what about the first Lucian Bute and Librado Andrade contest. The referee in their first encounter definitely determined the outcome.

Professional boxing depends a great deal on the judgments of referees and judges. That is why this list talks about who I feel are the best in the business for the year 2009. There aren't many.

Referees

Pat Russell

Year after year California's Pat Russell works the boxing ring like a cat and seems to have eyes behind his head. Not only does he let the fighters work inside and out, he also does not interfere unless absolutely necessary. And those eyes behind the head come in handy when staying out of the way of ringside photographers clicking away at the action. Russell was last year's choice and repeats as the best referee in the business. If there's an important fight with blockbuster implications, he's the guy. I often wonder why he's not used more often in other states.

Tony Weeks

Based in Las Vegas the Nevada ref has been the best in that state the last several years. He's extremely fair and with his knowledge of Spanish is handy to have around in a sport that boasts a large percentage of Spanish-speaking fighters. He moves around gracefully and knows exactly when to break up a clinch. It's an art form. He also lets the fighters fire body punches. Most times the taller referees begin warning about low blows at the first punch to the mid-section. Weeks actually waits until he sees a low blow. He doesn't guess.

Jack Reiss

Last year he just missed the cut, but this year he's proven to be consistent and extremely fair

inside the four corners. Often referees tend to side a hometown fighter or fellow countryman. Whether it's purposeful or not, many referees appear to favor one fighter over another; not Reiss. He's always seeking out opinions and looking to improve. Many referees take things personally if criticized. Reiss analyzes mistakes and doesn't repeat them inside the ring.

Kenny Bayless

The tall referee has become a fixture on the mega fights in Las Vegas. If there's a big fight you can bet Bayless will be one of the referees considered. He's almost never involved in controversy. He has a knack for getting in and out of the action when it matters and controls the fight effortlessly. Once a fight begins you can see the concentration on his face. From the six-rounders to the world title fights he's focused.

Benjy Esteves

Whenever I see that Esteves is refereeing I know it will be done fairly. He's very good at analyzing both fighters tendencies and letting them do what they do best. Some referees tend to not allow body punches, others tend to break up inside fighters and others let fighters who hold get away with too much. Esteves reads the fights very well and interprets the rules as applicable. It's a very good trait.

Raul Caiz Jr.

He wasn't on the list last year, but this year he raised his game again. Caiz's best attribute is impeccable timing. He knows exactly when to jump in and when to leave the fighters alone. Often he allows the flow of the fight to go uninterrupted unless an egregious act occurs. Caiz is back on track. His father Raul Caiz Sr. is also a referee and judge.

Judges

Jerry Roth

This Nevada judge has been around for several decades and continues to excel in interpreting prizefights. Consistency is his trademark and if you know what Roth likes in a fight and do those things then you will win the fight. Roth likes action and punches. The more punches the better. He's a fan friendly judge who almost always favors the busier and more accurate fighter. Let's hope he judges the Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather fight.

Max DeLuca

California's best is relatively young and so, so accurate. He's like a human thermometer when it comes to judging a fight. You look at his card and judge your own against his to see how close or far off. One of his strong points is the ability to see who is actually landing punches, not just throwing. If one fighter is connecting slightly more than the opponent, DeLuca will get it right. A very good judge.

Patricia Byrd

She had a very strong year in judging. The Nevada boxing judge can be counted to give the right decision even when others are far off. It's happened on several occasions that Byrd has it right. When I see her name as one of the judges it makes me feel comfortable. I know her decision will go the right way. Every year she improves and seems to be having an effect on the other female judges in Nevada who are very good.

Marty Denkin

He's been around for decades and has been seen refereeing in several boxing-based motion pictures like Rocky. Now he mainly judges and has been extremely fair in his assessments. Perhaps the best example was the fight between an undefeated local fighter John Molina and Mexico's Martin Honorio. Denkin was right on the money with his judgment and has been throughout 2009.

Julie Lederman

Previously I felt she was sub par as a judge but this year it was obvious that she is actually the reverse. Lederman has proven to be a very solid and fair judge. On several televised prizefights it was her card that was most accurate every single time. Like DeLuca, she is young and should be around for a long time.

Ray Corona

He's more known as a California referee but in his assignments as a judge he's given in some pretty consistent analysis. Like Lederman and DeLuca he's still young and should be contributing to the sport for decades to come. As both a referee and judge he's very fair. He could crack the list as a referee too pretty soon.