Written by Charles Jay
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The 1st Round

I start things off this way because it's something I hear a lot - what does this have to do with boxing from the fan's standpoint? In other words, all this boxing reform talk - isn't it just geared toward the boxing "insider"?

After all, you look at a guy who simply wants to sit on his couch and watch his boxing every week on ESPN or HBO or Showtime or Telefutura - and has a life aside from all that - he may ask, "Why in the world should I care about such esoteric issues as you have discussed, and will continue to discuss, regarding the reform of boxing?"

I'd be happy to answer that question, step-by-step:

* RELATIONSHIPS THAT EXIST WITHIN TV NETWORKS, SOME OF WHICH ARE THE RESULT OF RATHER "UNHOLY" ALLIANCES - HAVE A DIRECT BEARING ON THE KINDS OF FIGHTS YOU'LL SEE ON TELEVISION. In other words, the ingredients obviously have everything to do with the way the soup tastes. For example, Russell Peltz, a promoter who doubles as a network operative, was, until, recently, in control of much of what was put before the cameras on ESPN2's "Friday Night Fights". As a result of this relationship, some of Peltz' fighters, including junior welterweight Michael Stewart, received an unusual amount of airtime on the network. Stewart is a limited talent whose appeal stems, in large part, from the fact that he is white. It is in the best interests of Peltz to keep him winning. And more to the point, to MAKE SURE he was going to win. That meant that he had to put him in with substandard opponents - sometimes in a ten-round "co-feature" that was going to be televised. In that situation, the fan is seeing something that is of a lower quality than the product he/she COULD be saying. That happens time and time again. Here, the network is not operating in the best interests of the fan.

* NETWORKS HAVE "FAVORED" PROMOTERS WHO BRING TO THE TABLE AN AGENDA THAT IS SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT THAN THE INTEREST OF THE CONSUMER. Sometimes a network has an "output deal" with a promoter, to produce a specific number of shows over a specific period of time. Sometimes the network simply has a list of promoters they prefer to do business with, for reasons that are sometimes dubious. Either way, the promoters have fighters under promotional contract to them, and their obligation is not to put them in bloodbaths, but to develop them. And because they're under promotional contracts, usually for an extended period of time, the promoter will avoid taking a risk with them until the stakes are VERY high. This results in fights - in many cases, main events - that are designed to ADVANCE fighters, not TEST them. The people who are in charge of buying "product" for the networks, specifically those on basic cable, are buying the PROMOTER rather than the SHOW. Many times they have been offered something superior by someone else, but pass on it for the sake of perpetuating the existing relationship, whether there's a legitimate motive or not. Once again, you wind up watching something inferior to what you COULD be watching.

* YOU ARE ALSO HIT WITH FALSE ADVERTISING. You may turn a show on and see that a fight is billed as a "title" by a certain sanctioning body. In fact, it is actually an extension of a promotional organization, and in some cases, is a promoter in and of itself. And what you don't realize is that once the "champion" leaves that promoter, all of a sudden he doesn't have a title anymore. And how about when you are told there is a "blackout" on a fight, where the only way you can see it is to buy a ticket, when in fact there is no such blackout? A promoter, like Sugar Ray Leonard Boxing, is lying to you for the express purpose of squeezing an extra dollar out of you. Should you care? You better believe it.

* FOUL PLAY IN SANCTIONING BODIES AFFECTS THE PRODUCT YOU'RE ASKED TO WATCH - AND SOMETIMES PAY FOR. Mandatory contenders who are unqualified, inept, and completely undeserving can be a waste of your time and money. Then a network, because it is so thirsty to control a fighter's career, serves up that garbage, and sometimes will go out of its way to tell you it's legitimate, when it's actually just a product of politics. Can you possibly see something better? You can answer that question for yourself.

* A PROMOTER PUTS ON A CLUB SHOW AND BILKS YOU, THE FAN, OUT OF YOUR MONEY WITH A BUNCH OF MISMATCHES. You spend $20, $50, or $100 to attend a live show in your area. What you wind up with are four or five "house fighters" in with opponents who have records like 1-15 or worse. They all go down and out in a round or two, without a whole lot of effort. It's kind of depressing. And you've been subjected to it because the local commission didn't know enough - or didn't care enough - to perform any due diligence, to protect the fans from a product that was simply not fit for consumption. Would you like to have bought a ringside seat for something like that? Maybe you have already?

* A SHOW COULD DISAPPEAR RIGHT BEFORE YOUR EYES. You travel for an hour or two for some "mega" fight card for which you've spent a couple of hundred bucks apiece for ringside tickets for you and your wife. You show up at the arena and you find out that the main event fighter has pulled out because the promoter has failed to pay some of the purse money or expenses up front, as was the agreement, and in fact, has no money at all (something that could have very easily happened in the Christy Martin-Mia St. John fight). For this reason the show was canceled. Then you come to find out that the whole thing happened because there was no commission policy that would have required the promoter to
show he had enough funds to pay the fighters. Do you think you would care about the quality of boxing regulation THEN?

Get the point? What happens OUTSIDE the ring often has a very direct, and very substantial bearing on what happens INSIDE the ring. And that's exactly what we address.

I'm sure I could come up with more than what I've illustrated above. And undoubtedly, we'll have enough time to do so.

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