

## WARD, FROCH READY TO TALK...Borges

Written by Ron Borges

Thursday, 25 August 2011 18:02

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At times it looked like it would never happen and quite often it didn't seem worth the effort, but it is nearly here now and Carl Froch and Andre Ward seemed elated this week that their moment has nearly arrived.

After over two years fraught with injuries, question marks, disappointments, cancellations and adjustments, SHOWTIME's Super 6 super middleweight tournament is only two months away from crowning its 168-pound champion. Whether it turns out to be England's Froch or the last U.S. Olympian to win a Olympic gold medal, Ward, is almost secondary (except to them). What is paramount is that Ken Hershman pulled it off.

It was SHOWTIME's vice-president and general manager of sports who came up with the idea of putting together the top six 168-pounders in the world and matching them in a series of fights that would ultimately lead the final two into the ring with the most important thing in sports on the line – public recognition that the winner is truly the champion of the world.

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With the absence of Lucien Bute from the tournament that will remain an issue to debate among 168 pounders perhaps but Froch-Ward will still be widely recognized as a fight that settles most of the issues in the division because few can argue that any super middleweight other than Bute and these two remain in the discussion.

The Danes can talk about Mikkel Kessler all they want but he had his chances in this tournament and was found wanting. Same is true of former middleweight champion Arthur Abraham. WBO champion Robert Stieglitz (40-2) might have something to say about the subject but he's late to the dance so only after Froch-Ward decide who becomes the unified WBC-WBA champion and the winner faces Bute should he even be in the discussion (maybe by having to fight the loser of the Oct. 29 final?).

If soon after the winner is crowned it is announced he will face the undefeated Bute (29-0), who holds the IBF title as well as an equally valuable contract with SHOWTIME, all matters will have been decided in the ring and so they can all start over again from a higher profile and with a firmer grasp in the public's mind of who is the man to be beat, which is frankly a good idea that has for too long eluded the men who run the sport.

"What Ken has done has thrown away all the questions and politics in boxing," Eddie Hearn, Froch's manager, said this week during a three-day promotional tour to London, New York and finally Ward's hometown of Oakland, Calif.

"We have the best fighting the best to reveal the ultimate champion. This tournament has revolutionized the sport of boxing. It has taken out the politics of the sport that can hinder big fights and has left the best men in the division to square off."

That was the point all along and on that level it will have succeeded if the Super 6 final on Oct. 29 goes off without a hitch in Atlantic City. The winner will have fought his way through a gauntlet of difficult fights and Hershman will have survived an equally daunting series of problems.

"This has been an incredible endeavor and an exasperating one for all of us working behind the

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scenes,” Hershman admits. “But it has delivered thrilling fights and that is what we set out to do. As the tournament progressed we could see Andre Ward and Carl Froch were on a collision course. For this reason alone we’re in for a great fight.”

That will be decided by the fighters and, to a lesser extent, the referee and judges, but there is no reason to expect anything but a highly competitive fight between two guys with just enough stylistic differences to provide fireworks and interesting tactical issues that should intrigue fans of the sport.

“We have a lot of respect for Andre Ward but I have some bad news for you,” Hearn told a pro-Ward group of supporters. “Carl Froch is not human. He’s a machine. Andre Ward says he’s been in the trenches but he’s never been in trenches with England’s finest.

“This is a huge fight for Britain. Carl is now Britain’s No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter. He had nothing given him. He travels and fights away from home on the regular (basis). To defend his (WBC) title, capture the WBA, RING magazine belts and the Super 6 Cup would mean everything to a guy who has had to do everything on his own.”

Probably so but it’s not exactly like Ward was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. In fact, he barely had a spoon for a time. Even once he began to show promise in the prize ring he was an afterthought, first at the Olympic Games and then when lightly regarded by many as the Super 6 tournament began. At that time the thought was he had simply been included to get a few recognizable American names in the mix to create early interest, yet as the tournament went along Ward emerged as a star in the making and someone who can help revitalize the sport in the U.S. if he continues to win and continues to look at the world the way he does now.

“When I started in this tournament everyone had questions about me,” Ward said. “Everyone has doubts. Now there are some people that say I’m the favorite but I don’t feel that way. I still have a chip on my shoulder.

“I don’t know if this tournament and the final would be what it is if it didn’t have the bumps in the road. Difficulties make you appreciate things. There were several times I thought it was over but then I’d get a call saying we’re back on. Don’t get frustrated by the journey; enjoy the ride.

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“We (both) know why we’re here. I expected from the beginning to make it to the final and slowly but surely we made believers out of a lot of people that doubted me. But I would not call either of us “great,” Carl nor I. That term is thrown around too loosely today.

“You have to earn that and that’s what I want to do, to earn that name “great.” This is the kind of fight you have to fight and you have to win in order to be considered “great.””

The whole way Ward looks at things is refreshing. He’s not beating his chest, hollering about his greatness. He fight and lets’ you decide.

Equally refreshing is how he and Froch got to this point. They fought their way here. No politics, no purposeful avoidance of a deserving challenger. They faced down strong opposition, accepted who was put in front of them even when rugged Glen Johnson became an unexpected late addition. They didn’t complain nor try to explain.

They fought.

Refreshing idea that hopefully will reward both the fighters and SHOWTIME, which battled as hard to keep the tournament alive after Jermain Taylor and Kessler pulled out as it did to create it in the first place. Now it’s down to the final fight and two guys who got to this point the old fashioned way.

“This has been a fantastic tournament by SHOWTIME Sport,” the two-time world champion Froch said. “Some have said it has taken too long or that it’s been drawn out but these fights that were made possible in the Super 6...,with the six best guys out there, would not have happened had we not had the tournament.

“The Final is what a top sport is all about. We have the two best fighters facing off for it all. This is the essence of sport.”

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Indeed it is so when the fight finally happens maybe someone should hand Ken Hershman a trophy, too.