Written by Eric Raskin
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In a sport with as many moving pieces, individual interests, and BS agendas as there are in boxing, nothing is ever entirely predictable. But as 2012 dawns, the year ahead feels even more unpredictable than usual. The HBO boxing department has a new leader, and he used to be the head of the Showtime boxing department. Consequently, the Showtime boxing department has a new leader, and he used to be an employee of Golden Boy Promotions. Over at ESPN, both the main man in front of the camera and the main man behind the scenes have stepped down. And switching from the guys in suits to the guys in trunks, my pound-for-pound number one, Floyd Mayweather, takes up residence at the Clark County Detention Center this Friday, my pound-for-pound number two, Manny Pacquiao, might just be in decline, and my pound-for-pound number three, Sergio Martinez, basically told HBO to suck it last week.

2012 is probably going to be a lot different than 2011 and 2010. (Except for one thing: 2010 was “the year Mayweather and Pacquiao didn’t fight each other,” 2011 was also “the year

Mayweather and Pacquiao didn't fight each other," and 2012 just might be shaping up as "the year Mayweather and Pacquiao didn't fight each other.")

With this much uncertainty surrounding the sport of boxing as the calendar turns over, it's a perfect time to ask and answer all of the burning questions on fight fans' minds regarding the 12 months to come. We'll start with the question we just can't seem to get away from, and move on from there:

Will Mayweather and Pacquiao fight each other?

Not in the first half of the year. But could it happen on one of those traditional pay-per-view blockbuster dates in September or November? It's highly possible that Floyd—seeing a slipping Pacquiao and hearing a ticking clock—will want it, highly possible that Bob Arum will recognize that the end of the Pacquiao era is nigh and begrudgingly pursue it, and a near-certainty that the fearless and fan-friendly Pacquiao will want it. I think the biggest X-factor is what happens with Pacquiao's fight in the spring. My guess is that he'll fight Juan Manuel Marquez for a fourth time. (I'm not buying the idea of less marketable fights against Tim Bradley or Lamont Peterson, and I think Miguel Cotto is too smart to want a rematch with Pac.) And as we all know now, any fight against Marquez is a fight Pac-Man can lose. If he does lose, Pacquiao-Mayweather becomes pointless. If he wins—especially if he does so without controversy—Pacquiao-Mayweather is red hot again. The final guess here: Pacquiao fights Marquez, defeats him narrowly, and all parties are ready to cash in with Pacquiao-Mayweather in the fall, to the tune of 2.8 million PPV buys.

Will anything happen at heavyweight to make anyone in America care?

Only two things can move the needle at this point: a Klitschko losing or a serious new American contender emerging. The former ain't happening (although I wouldn't mind seeing a healthy Odlanier Solis get a rematch against Vitali; he has the skill to be less than a 10-1 underdog, which probably isn't true of any other potential challenger). So we need an American up-and-comer to get excited about, and Seth Mitchell, who performed as impressively as anyone could have hoped in his HBO debut in December, is the only guy with an outside chance. Unfortunately, I see the media's need to find the next great heavyweight and the fact that the pressure can't be spread among numerous hopefuls as a formula for Mitchell to disappoint. He'll struggle to an underwhelming decision win against a veteran contender to start the year, then he'll take heat for dialing back the competition to someone sub-Timor-Ibragimov

the next time out. He'll escape 2012 still unbeaten and a legit top-10 contender (in a division that goes only two deep, it should be noted), but the buzz on December 31 won't be what it was on January 1.

What impact will Ken Hershman and Stephen Espinoza have?

From the looks of things, Hershman's job at HBO is going to be even more challenging than he probably expected, with Golden Boy having a built-in relationship with the new Showtime boss, with Victor Ortiz-Andre Berto II already jumping networks, with Sergio Martinez announcing that his next fight won't be on HBO, and with Mayweather out of the mix for the first half of the year. It sure looks like the stage is set for Showtime to challenge HBO's supremacy, even if they remain at a budgetary disadvantage. Then again, Hershman didn't earn the HBO job by being an ambition-less dummy. Sort of like how the peak of the WWF-WCW war from around 1996-'99 saw both companies pushing each other to reach new levels of entertainment, I suspect the HBO/Showtime shakeups will work out to the great benefit of boxing fans once the slow first month of 2012 has passed. (And I feel at least 63 percent confident in predicting that we won't see Gary Russell Jr. in a four-rounder on either network at any time in 2012.)

Will we get Andre Ward vs. Lucian Bute?

Ward has already earned the right to call himself The Man at 168 pounds, but if he wants to be The Undisputed Man, he does still need to take care of business against Bute. And I suspect he intends to. Ward's apparent disinterest in the Romanian-Canadian immediately following his Super Six finals victory over Carl Froch struck me as a negotiating ploy. Ward knows the fight belongs north of the border and if he's going to concede home-ring advantage, he wants to at least hardball his way to the larger purse. Plus, Ward's last five fights have come against Mikkel Kessler, Allan Green, Sakio Bika, Arthur Abraham, and Froch, lasting an average of 11.8 rounds; he's entitled to a tuneup. So in the spring expect Bute vs. Froch and Ward vs. someone he can knock out, and then in the fall expect Ward vs. Bute if Froch doesn't upset that plan.

Who will be the new Friday Night Fights studio host?

I assume we'll get this answer any day now, since, you know, there's an FNF broadcast scheduled for this Friday. But in the meantime, my quick prediction: Bernardo Osuna. He's a

part of the ESPN family already, he's polished in front of the camera, he knows boxing, and he's bilingual, which is handy when it comes to interviewing certain guests or even translating from a distance for Joe and Teddy. I have no inside information on this, other than me talking to Osuna in Las Vegas in November and him saying he didn't know anything yet, but if you find out in a day or two that he got the gig, you heard it here first.

Whose opposition will piss fans off more, Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. or Saul Alvarez?

Before I answer the question, allow me to follow my Ring Theory co-host Bill Dettloff's lead and note that I will henceforth cease to refer to JCC Jr. as a "Chavez" because he's unworthy of that surname, and instead refer to him as Julio Cesar Salad. (And thanks to friend-of-a-friend of the podcast Cliff Brown for this delightful image: http://img15.imageshack.us/img15/8231/saladu.png .) Honestly, Salad and Canelo are being moved with near-equal calculated carefulness, but Salad is 4½ years older, so Canelo gets more of a pass if he spends another year fighting safe opposition. That said, Marco Antonio Rubio is a credible challenge for Salad, assuming Top Rank doesn't drug Rubio in the dressing room. So if Alvarez fights a total patsy in April, he might exceed Salad in terms of his heat index. This is a tough call, but I'll go with Chavez as the greater whipping boy of the fans by year's end. The only thing I know for sure is this: Salad will not fight Sergio Martinez in 2012 and Alvarez will not fight Miguel Cotto in 2012, and yet both fringe contenders will insist on calling themselves "champions."

Which American former middleweight champion will have a greater impact in the boxing ring, Jermain Taylor or Kelly Pavlik?

This is a modified version of a question I asked Dettloff last week on Ring Theory, and I'm asking it again because it's fascinating that Taylor might be in a position to make a little noise again while his two-time conqueror, Pavlik, appears to have unraveled so severely in his personal life that his career might never resume. But I'm going to go against the grain and select Pavlik as the answer to this question. If Pavlik fights in 2012—a major "if," I realize—the tabloid-ish attention surrounding his first fight will guarantee that his impact exceeds Taylor's. I think as long as Cameron Dunkin and company can haul Pavlik the hell outta Youngstown and get him into Robert Garcia's gym in southern California, there's a good chance "The Ghost" will be in line for 2012's Comeback of the Year.

What are the three most horrifying things Jose Sulaiman will say this year?

1. “The WBC proudly supports Jerry Sandusky.”

2. “Did you see the way that bee-otch was dressed? She was asking for it!”

3. “I am pleased to announce I have been re-elected president of the WBC by a unanimous vote of the board of directors.”

Eric Raskin can be contacted at RaskinBoxing@yahoo.com. You can follow him on Twitter @EricRaskin and listen to new episodes of his podcast, Ring Theory, at http://ringtheory.podbean.com.

Comment on this article

ali says:

Mayweather vs Pac will happen in 2012 I think Arum will finally come to his senses...I do think Andre Ward should take a tune up fight before getting in the ring with Bute...I remember when Trinidad kept taking tough fight after tough fight and it caught up with him against B-Hop..Boxing need a super heavyweight division I think that would help...Taylor will make more noise in 2012 then Pavlik I believe....

the Roast says:

I didn't know Brian Kenny was out on FNF. I was just starting to like that guy.

brownsugar says:

Short but Sweet ali,..... Mayweather and Pac "MUST FIGHT", although I believe Bradley and Peterson could provide ample competition for Pac even to the point of causing a potential once in a million upset. Heavyweights, fuggedaboutit,.... Mitchell,... although being an honest hardworking prospect still needs some carefull management and a lot more experience.. Brittains David Price is the closest to becoming heir to the throne but he's still a year or 2 away. Seeing Jermaine in the ring scares me,... Seeing Kelly in the ring makes me want to get a refill. But Kelly has the most potential if he stays clean.... Ward wants the world to know he's not going to be anybodies pawn..... He'll walk in the swagger of a grisled, babtised in blood warrior, capable of carrying his own share of the audience when the time finally comes that he meets

Bute. The anticipation will be through the roof and it will be one of the most highly awaited fights of the year.

ali says:

Brownsugar u got rolling...Looking at Kelly makes u want to have a refill lol thanks homie I needed a good laugh.

the Roast says:

Love that pic Sug, looks like you had a good time NYE!

the Roast says:

No way in hell Peterson could hang with Pacman. He only beat Khan cuz of hometown cookin. Bradley might be able to compete with Pac only because of that third fist he uses. Pac vs Bradley would be a NC early or a techD after 6. If I managed a fighter the only way I'd let my guy in with Bradley would be the Ram has to grow two inches at least of hair.

Radam G says:

@Ali, your boy Money May is a jailbird bytch. I doubt that he fights Da Manny. He knows what tyme it is. Can you tell time? Holla!

MisterLee says:

Yo man, I feel Bradley and Peterson can give Pacquiao some problems. Pacquiao has faced bigger guys with no defense. In addition, Pacquiao has only done well agst boxer punchers (Mosley, Cotto), face first and straightforward fighters (Hatton, Margarito), and old fighters (Oscar, Mosley). The people he's really looked lousy against had boxing ability (Clottey and Marquez) or had a boxing game plan (Mosley). Bradley and Peterson can box, and Peterson has the defense as well as height/reach to give Pacquiao some problems. Bradley has the fast feet and head movement and nice jab to keep Pacquiao working. I'd say Peterson can give a competitive fight and a MAYBE upset, I say Bradley wipes him out in a clear decision. Styles make fights, and Pac has avoided boxers long enough, let's see a REAL challenge! I say 135 and 140lbers give Pac more problems than 147 or 154lbers b/c they are used to handling speedsters like Pacquiao. The bigger guys just say 3 of 'dem ("hit the one in the middle! THAT'S RIGHT, HIT THE ONE IN THE MIDDLE!"). Word. Wussup guys!

Radam G says:

Wow! The brain has 100 billion neurons. A ton of people probably use about 100. And their eyes and brains have serious connection problems. No matter the reality, their brains conprehend in a fantasy to support their prejudices and reality distortions. And some dead serious inattention blindless and hardcore media manipulation.

Everybodee and dey momma and everyone and his cousin saw Da Manny whup the pure syet outta of Clottey and Mosley. The jokers were so intimidated that they didn't even want to fight to survive. Clottey claimed that he had the sh*ts and spoke to his cornerman about quitting on the strool.

Mosley had the sore foot. Hehehehehe! Da scare-of-Da-Manny pug even asked for his trainer Genie ["Brotha"> Naazim to stop the bout. But da great and powerful genie doesn't play punking jive. Go to Youtube and holla at that jive. Wow! This new frontier of pugilism cyberspace clutter, mutter and butter never amaze me. The ___ ____ ____ ___ that haters and faders can come up with.

Hehehehehe! I just luv this Universe. And the range of point of views spitted. Holla!

brownsugar says:

Roast, I was fried in that pic... LOL... I knew my comments about Bradley and Lamont were a bit of stretch. But wouldn't it be something...Guys like Margarito and Clottey didn't have a clue how to beat the much smaller Pac,.. but guys closer to his size might be able to box him all night long..... I'm just sayin.

the Roast says:

@Sug, maybe, maybe not. I think it will take a special fighter to beat Manny. Someone like.....Floyd Mayweather.

Radam G says:

Jailbird -- I mean Money -- May will be Da Manny's easily fight if MM takes T enhancement for da cojones. Dude has too much female E in him right now. This is why he thinks that he could whup his babies' momma arse and be cool. NYET! Now he will be eating lunch with OJ. And I wonder if they are going to touch bootahs. Holla!

Ted says:

Love Raskin´s articles. I hardly come to this site though, as M. Woods seems like a bit of a pompous ass (his political tweets on ESPN´s boxing links are the worst), but I do dodge his articles to see Raskin in print!

admin says:

Thx for reading, Ted! LOL [QUOTE=Ted;12224]Love Raskin´s articles. I hardly come to this site though, as M. Woods seems like a bit of a pompous ass (his political tweets on ESPN´s boxing links are the worst), but I do dodge his articles to see Raskin in print![/QUOTE]

the Roast says:

Oh course Radam, Manny walks on water as you see it. No one will ever beat Da Manny. Pacman's next two fights should be Andre Ward (Manny by KO in 6 or less) and then Wlad. Clint Jackson could have been heavyweight champ at 5'6 and a half so I got Manny over Wlad in 2.

Radam G says:

Wow! The Roast, you apparently didn't know Clint Jackson. The dude was 6-foot tall and walked around at a buck 85 and sure could kick most heavyweights' arses back then. There are a lot of eye-witnesses -- not ear-witnesses -- to that. TSS Pugilistic Super Scribe F-Lo could probably tell you about the time that Clint put it on Michael Dokes. Clint got on his roast and toast. When it came to whuppin' heavies' arses, he was da most! He beat Mike Dokes like a drum. Hehehehehe! Clint would murda' da bums of nowadays.

It ain't no big deal to walk on water. Small-brained animals and insects can do that Jesus jive. Hehehehehe! And Da Manny would give SOG a pass. And Doc Wlad wouldn't get the time of day. Something like Sergio "Callin' out a little man" Martinez.

Hey, the Roast, what happened to your interviews? C'mon, Man! I want an exclusive every single TSS reader and dey sidekicks. Hehehehehe! You know me! I'm down with O-P-P! Holla!

the Roast says:

The interview series has gone the way of all flesh, it's dead. I was in negotiations with F4JC for a blockbuster matchup but it was not meant to be. Maybe if the Powers That Be allow the banned one back in we can mix it up. I thought Clint Jackson was a jr middle who got beat by Frank Fletcher among others. I thought we had been down this road before. We argued early in the year about Wlad and tallies vs shorties, it was an early candidate for fight of the year before Mort-F4JC went all Gatti-Ward up in here.

Radam G says:

True dat! CJ took a beatdown from the "Animal." But CJ is still 6-foot tall. Holla!

Radam G says:

I recall our jivy debate about the sorry-a$$ fatties, tallies and giants from eating every dang thing on the table, in the kitchen and in sight.

And I now know why there are not any great heavyweights around nowadays. Because back in the day, the little men couldn't stay little and make that pay. Nowadays, Money exists for all weight classes, including the 20 made-up divisions. So you don't have the small Tommy Burns, Jack Dempey, Rocky Marcianos, Ezzard Charles and Jimmy Ellis going up in weight to challenge huge bums and tomato cans to get a deason purse for throwing down in that squared jungle. Fighters can now stay where it is easy and comfortable and still get paid.

It is nonsense talk about America great heavyweight fighters are now playing Yankie-style football, basketball or are washing the drawers of Big Bubble and Lil' Red' in a jail cell. Holla!

the Roast says:

I've never seen Rock Jr but he's good then we need him. Is he a pro? Just asking cuz I don't know. Whatever fight fans feel for the K Bros, like them or not, we need an influx of youth in the heavyweight division. I don't care who it is or where he comes from. What do you think about Deontay Wilder RG? From what I've seen he is raw as hell and still fighting bums. The next Tyson or Holyfield has to be out there somewhere, at least I hope so.

Radam G says:

Rock Jr is still in the amateurs. He's a kid 16 years old or maybe 17 by now. I think that Deontay Wilder is below good. And a little hyped because of desperation of wanting an American heavyweight contender. Holla!