

Written by Phil Woolever

Thursday, 05 January 2012 09:40



BLASTS PAST - GrandpaGloves '11 hobbles into the graveyard of calendars while Boxing Baby 2012 begins the crawl. New Year's blessings to all.

We must bury Boxing2011 with few wreaths of greatness, but we can also praise many honorable and entertaining duke-outs during that past twelve months. The game itself deserves "Fighter of the Year" consideration for once again making naysayers look like trolls, slithering around beneath the ringside seats.

Even a bad year in boxing is as good as a normal year in most sports.

Still, with persistent negative images, perceived miscues or improprieties and, perhaps most damaging; stars' questionable efforts in "championship" events, this certainly wasn't amongst the best seasons ever. It really wasn't a bad year overall for the brand worldwide though, while regrettable that two of the very biggest, potentially classic fights in the global spotlight, Pacquiao - Mosley and Klitschko - Haye, were complete duds.

As always, there were thousands more good scores or calls than bad, but last year it seemed there were far more unsatisfactory calls in fights of the very highest profile, like Floyd Mayweather Jr - Victor Ortiz stateside or Yoan Pablo Hernandez - USS Cunningham in

Germany. Around here, the weirdest sour ending was when Vitali Klitschko stopped Odlanier Solis on a one punch leg injury. Uncommon and uncanny.

In European territory, there was sustained interest in local titles and local prospects, with limited coverage of the US scene. In Germany, and probably Britain, Mayweather got much more ink and screen time than Manny Pacquiao. Then again, in 2011 Floyd had many of what you could call more "newsworthy" days than other fighters.

Around this continent and the UK there was plenty of good action at the ground level. Boxing remains a bigger consumer sport here than in the States. Pay per view is limited or non-existent in most regions. That means almost every big fight is on free TV. Makes a difference. In Germany the amount of viewers is usually quite substantial, a trend probably common in nearby domains. The business model, kind of like '50s USA, is apparently good for the sport.

The K2 promotional express rolled on, setting the standard for class, like a precision luxury coup gliding down the autobahn at warp speed. Newer muggs like Alexander Povetkin, Robert Helenius, Tyson Fury, Hernandez, and Amir Kahn became more regular in the sports pages. In Germany, "Smokin'" Joe's passing was widely noted with respect of an appropriate magnitude.

There seems to be enough punch for profit going around Germany to make everyone happy. At least three major broadcasting companies (possible affiliations unknown) transmit fights relatively often, and strongly support them through a related media umbrella which includes high-def live streams.

Klitschko stadium galas, while not as red-hot or expensive a ticket as a couple years back, fill tens of thousands of seats three or four times a year with no visible decline in the demand for premium VIP packages (maybe it should be VEP: very expensive person). Sauerland Event, the area's most active premium promotional outfit, regularly puts on excellent major title cards that average around four to six thousand customers. The club fight type scene looks very popular at many local gyms, which sponsor bouts for a couple hundred people.

Here, boxing is mainstream enough that advertising campaigns present boxing based images as a desirable, marketable attribute. Fitness, fashion and general goods get the gloved-up treatment. Michael Buffer has been prominently featured for many months in promos

for one of the biggest retail companies in Germany.

There is probably more general boxing coverage in the UK than other parts of Europe I've seen, with regular profiles outside usual immediate or upcoming fight time frames. German media provides good coverage of many fights immediately preceding specific events. In Germany there are many celebrity-based photos of boxers among daily paper tabloids. Unlike UK Page 3 types, Deutschland's topless frauleins adorn page one of some city newspapers.

European boxing's current state of the art exists in incomplete self sufficiency, stability and with an ongoing, replenished talent pool. Top amateur prospects may be less protected than many of the future US stars I saw. Overall, through size alone the talent pool around Germany is far more shallow than a place like LA or Vegas in terms of global impact. Between strong national programs at both amateur and pro levels there is a considerable migration of former Soviet Union state area prospects who head west for more optimal training conditions.

Professionally, at the novice to mid-prelim range things look much the same as in the US. Maybe it's something in the water, wine or workout that later separates an emergence of true world class performers. In 2011, the ambassadors from these European parts didn't fare so well in global arenas. German star Arthur Abraham got spanked in the Super Six while respected Sebastian Zbik and Serhiy Dzhinziruk also met defeat on US shores. Abraham gets back on lighter horse in around a week. Dzhinziruk, who got stopped by worthy champion Sergio Martinez and Zbik, narrowly outpointed by improving JC Chavez Jr went back to the drawing board with new opportunities. Sebastian Sylvester, who lost his IBF middleweight belt to Daniel Geale then got stopped by Grzegorz Proszka, may digress to a spoiler role.

Perhaps the most shocking difference in the German scene is that here, the cruiserweight division is very strong and entertaining. No, I did not stay too long in Amsterdam for New Year's (just long enough, actually).

There are many solid cruisers who will never earn a title but are no easy notch, a bit like fringe heavyweight contenders of the 70-80s. Guys who probably hit the ring fight night well over 200 pounds like Ola Alofabi or Denis Lebedev are the fringes of the 2010s. Guys like Hernandez and Cunningham might have won bouts against previous heavies like James Tillis, Joe Mesior Tyrell Biggs.

Euro Bureau Best of Last Year...WOOLEVER

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Differences in national application and results cause no major deficiencies in anyone's product. It's still two women or women, generally braver and in better shape than the average citizen, getting into a ring and throwing hands.

Consistent levels of Vegas main events and featured undercard bouts apparently still dwarf the euro scene atop the fistful food chain, but the overall spectacle is much the same. Some Klitschko VIP parties rival glitter gulch presentations. For the record, as a fight destination nothing matches Vegas in the 80s-90s, probably the modern era's height of boxing glamour. So far.

That summit may remain unmatched, but there are many fine fights and fighters to observe in these parts nowadays. Here's the best of what I saw firsthand last year.

Fighter(s) of the Year : The Kbro's split this one by way of both dominant and dubious distinction. From one perspective, nobody really came close to matching the level of exemplary professionalism Wlad and Vit have maintained for relative eons now, in everything from proper preparation to charitable sidelines. On the other side of the coin, during 2011 there were few major Euros who had very good years. Lebedev pounding Roy Jones or James Toney in Moscow isn't exactly a Renaissance.

Fight of the Year - I'm going with Marco Huck's (pictured) frenzied 10th round KO versus Hugo Garay in Munich's Olympic Ice Stadium last July. It was not the most finesse based exercise ever conducted between the strands, but it was one heck of a two-way brawl that made the 4,404 or so fans in attendance loco. Both men were stunned multiple times during huge exchanges. Garay was a perfect foil, and made an upset look entirely possible more than a couple times. Icing on the conking cake was Huck's way over the top entrance featuring a live performance by pop-rocker Sera Lee, complete with unisex dancing boxers using flaming gloves. A live cartoon.

There was less of the essential mauling mayhem, but in terms of top level technique the runner-up nod goes to the controversial Felix Sturm-Matthew Macklin endurance contest. Sturm's subsequent draw against Martin Murray looked nearly as good on TV, and Hernandez-Cunningham shaped up as a thriller before an accidental cut.

Round of the Year: Sturm- Macklin round 12. A great promotion with a full house of 19,000

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inCologne. Excellent battle, arguably up for grabs down the stretch. I gave the round to Sturm by a punch, but the fight to Macklin by a point. Runner up: Povetkin-Chagaev round 6. Yes it was a bit of a big boy slog, but well-fought overall behind plenty of heavy thuds. Maybe it takes a strong bruiser like Chagaev to bring out the best in Povetkin. Reminiscent of '80s elimination waltzes featuring guys like Dokes, Weaver or Cobb.

Event of the Year : Vitali K - Adamek in Wroclaw, Poland, where the locals showed why their economy is growing. Students of boxing lore may recall the Dempsy-Gibbons fiasco in Shelby, Montana. This was the other side of the payoff coin, in a still under construction stadium area to be used again for the 2012 European football/soccer tournament. It looked like almost everyone in town came for the spectacle. As a heavyweight fight, it was merely an impressive performance by the much larger, more experienced Kbro, who did what he was supposed to do against a brave but overmatched foe. Nothing extraordinary. As a cultural gathering, it was a rare scene of mass humanity with boxing at the center. The last time I observed anything like it was Lewis-Tyson in Memphis. It was later sad to hear that Adamek was parting ways with Main Events, whose quiet efficiency contributed to both an amazing event and Adamek's overall status in the ranks. Nothing in these parts came close as a runner up.

Debacle of the Year : Goes hands and happy pants down to the Klitschko-Haye fight. As a fight scene, Hamburg was the opposite of Wroclaw. Imagine. A chance for redemption of the marketability mothballed heavyweight division on a single July evening in Hamburg. Even a near constant, chilling downpour couldn't drown the highly-anticipated showdown. Six or seven thousand visiting Brit fans completely outcheered the rest in a soaked crowd that looked around 38,000 deep. Despite the drenching, when the last prefight fireworks went off, there was real, electrified anticipation in the air. That lasted around four more minutes, to a point in round two when most of the stadium started figuring out they were not in for a classic. The soggy Brit vocalists put more heart into their effort than Haye did into his, and sang for more frames than he fought.

Prospective International Star : There are currently a pair of potential primo punchers on the rise : '04 Olympic silver medalist and WBA "something or other" middleweight titlist Gennady Golovkin and '08 heavyweight gold medalist Rakhim "The Machine" Chakhkiev, a southpaw cruiserweight. Hernandez could also be considered, but almost all his potential competition is based in Germany and the usual suspects are pretty much unknowns. Right now Chakhkiev looks like a future heavyweight force, maybe a Denis Boytsov type without the hand issues.

KO : Afolabi's huge blast out of Terry Dunstan on the Klitschko-Haye undercard was the most obvious call until December, when Glovovkin creamed the reportedly never dropped Lajuan

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Simon, who'd looked solid against Abraham and Sylvester. Whatever your preference, both short hooks produced splattering, crowd jolting first round stoppages.

Progress: Fury and Helenius moved themselves to the front of the Klitschko sweepstakes pack by staying busy. Though defeated, Zbik and Dzinziruk went from being unknowns in America to being unknowns in America who are now only another decent effort away from being well-known enough for a good payday.

Comeback: Haye. Completely unearned, but somehow he rose from July mockery to confirmed year-end mention as most likely contender for an early summer stadium fight against Kbro Vitali.

Class Act: The Klitschko brothers again. When the main knock, year after year, is their complete lack of competition, they're doing something a lot better than everybody else.

Country to country, the Americas still seem superior in the manly art. All said, if everything looked equal on paper, I'd pick Latin American or US based fighters over their European counterparts at least seven times out of ten.

It's a good sign that the new year starts with a return of the sport to a foundational network. NBC's Chambers-Liakhovich free cable broadcast could well be the event of next year, one way or another.

The positive perspective, as usual, is that there were lots of good fights all over the lumping landscape by honorable, well prepared performers who maintained boxing's best traditions and highest standards.

The fight game remained a vibrant piece of the social equation last year, and the planet continued

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to spin as old calendars and old champions were replaced.

There is a lot of middle ground between thriving and starving.

Boxing's belly may be lean, but it isn't under-nourished.

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Radam G says:

Wow! I guess _____! Holla!

dino da vinci says:

@Radam. How's my man doin? Rad, I'm as good as anybody in the world at solving problems, puzzles, riddles, etc. But three straight blanks? C'mon, give a brother a chance to unlock the brilliance that is the Radam G.

At this pace, It'll be any day now I'll log in and see:

Radam G: _____
_____ and a big _____! Holla back!

brownsugar: @Radam G. I agree! But you have to admit that he does carry above average power.

Ali: You're insane! And you could of worded it a little better.

mortcola: Why do I come here again?

FightingHarada1: (A newbie). I'm new to this forum, and I evidently got here late. Is it me, or is that Radam G guy with all the posts OK? My brother is liscensed to practice now.

dino da vinci: @FH1. I speak Radam. No, we won't be needing your brother. Some mornings Radam is so excitable he forgets to take his meds. However, on the mornings he does, he's an insightful, combative, highly interesting fella. Of course, on the mornings he forgets, well, he's just an interesting fella. More importantly, do you know where Radam G and I can get some completely blank Sudoku to engage in?

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Radam G says:

_____ is Blank! Blank! Blank! _____ and _____ d _____ is Blank,
blank, blank and Blanka d Blank! You know me! I'm down with OPP! And GOMB!
Hehehehehe! It's all good! Holla!

dino da vinci says:

I'm starting to think you're somewhat irrational behavior may be directly linked to slyly trying to pad your almost insurmountable lead!

dino da vinci says:

I did say "almost"...

dino da vinci says:

Hearing footsteps Radam?

dino da vinci says:

Hmmm?

dino da vinci says:

Gee, this is easy!

OK, I'm done. For now.

Radam G says:

Hehehehehe! DDV is on his comedy fame. The Roast has a contender on his six. Holla!

ali says:

Kel Brook is the most promising euro I've seen in a long time...Im looking forward to seeing him fight again.

dino da vinci says:

@Ali. I agree. Does a lot of the things I like. Only saw him once, but was impressed. Years ago I would have known about him early on in his career, so I have quite a bit of catching up to do.