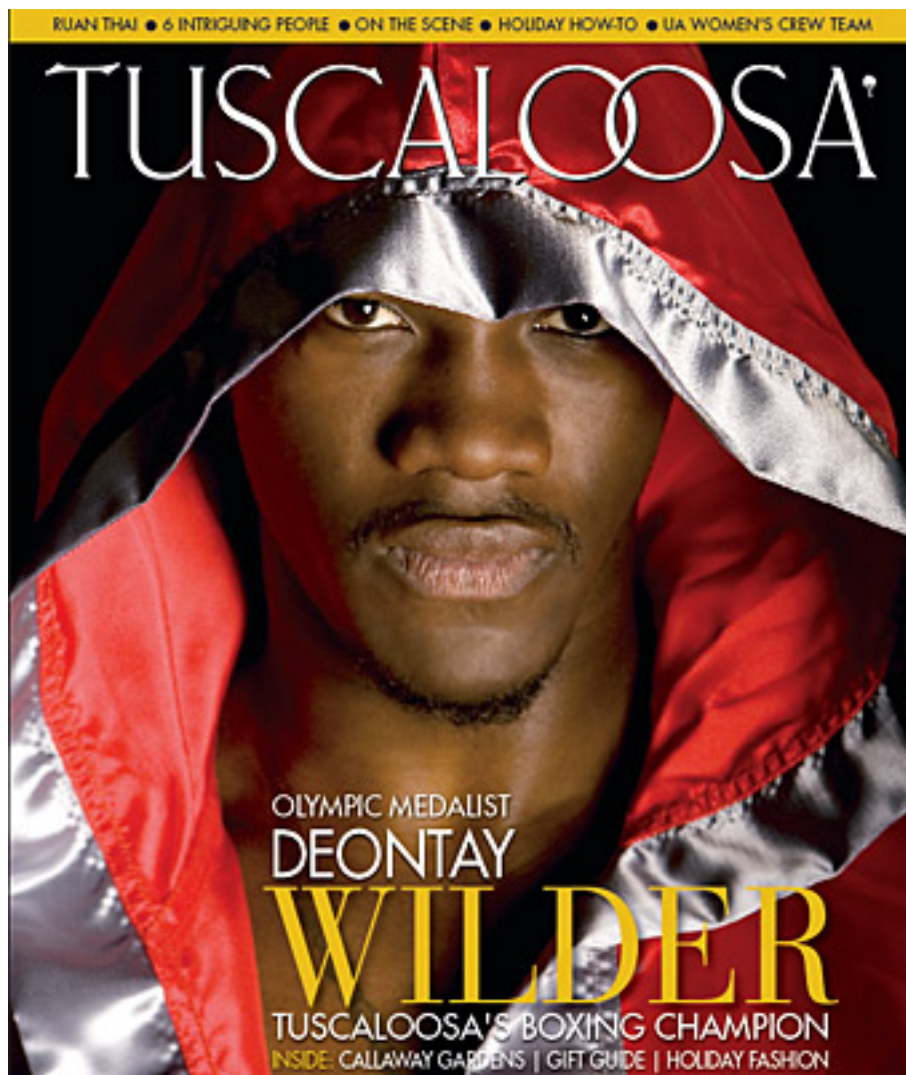


Deontay Wilder vs. Marlon Hayes

Written by Thomas Hauser

Monday, 27 February 2012 10:23



Nine years ago, I authored an article entitled "Professional Losers" that recounted the travesty of fighters who travel from state to state for the purpose of serving as cannon fodder.

"These fighters are different from perennial losers in other sports," I wrote. "We're not talking about a high school basketball team that loses forty games in a row. Athletes 'play' sports like baseball, football, tennis, and golf. No one plays boxing. These men are getting punched in the head, hard. They're prime candidates for brain damage. And when they enter the ring, the spectators aren't paying to watch a competitive fight. They're paying to see someone get beaten up. There's a difference."

One of the fighters I referenced in that article was Bradley Rone, who had lost twenty-five bouts in a row. On Friday, July 18, 2003, three days after the article appeared online, Rone collapsed in the ring after the first round of a bout against Billy Zumbun in Cedar City, Utah. Within hours,

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he was pronounced dead.

That bit of history came to mind this past week when I learned that Deontay Wilder was slated to fight Marlon Hayes on the undercard of Devon Alexander vs. Marcos Maidana in St. Louis on Saturday night.

Wilder (a 6-foot-7-inch heavyweight) was a bronze medalist at the 2008 Olympics). He's 20-and-0 as a pro with 20 knockouts. That record is deceiving, since most of his bouts have been against soft touches. Still, Hayes was particularly soft.

Hayes is forty years old and hadn't been in the ring since 2007. He's 5-feet-9-inches tall and came in against Wilder having lost eight of his last nine fights. Worse, Marlon campaigned for most of his career as a super-middleweight.

Wilder-Hayes was a mismatch from the start. Predictably, the bout ended in a knockout for Wilder; his twenty-first in twenty-one pro fights. But as trainer Don Turner has said, "You build a record that way. You don't build a fighter."

One of the people I quoted in "Professional Losers" was Tim Leuckenhoff (president of the Association of Boxing Commissions).

"We wish we had the power to suspend some of these fighters," Leuckenhoff told me. "But under federal law, we don't. Unfortunately, a fighter can only be suspended by a state in which he has a license. Sometimes that happens. But a month or two later when the suspension expires, they're back in the ring again. And most of these guys are smart enough to steer clear of states that would put them on a permanent suspension list."

That quote is relevant now because Leuckenhoff is also Executive Director of the Missouri Office of Athletics, which regulates boxing in Missouri. In that capacity, Leuckenhoff approved Deontay Wilder vs. Marlon Hayes.

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Not good.

* * *

On a more positive note, a tip of the hat to Epix is in order.

Epix is a joint venture between Viacom, Paramount, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, and Lionsgate that offers programming to viewers on television, the Internet, and various consumer electronic devices. It's available through a limited number of cable systems in 30,000,000 homes. Subscribers who receive Epix through their cable system provider (authenticated users) can also watch Epix on www.epixhd.com.

The heart of Epix's programming is feature films. More than three thousand titles are available to subscribers. But the network also offers documentaries, concerts, comedy programs, and sports (most notably boxing).

The first fight televised on Epix was Vitali Klitschko vs. Odlanier Solis on March 19, 2011. The network is now nearing the end of a remarkable run highlighting the three major heavyweight beltholders within the course of fifteen days.

First, on February 18th, Vitali Klitschko decisioned Dereck Chisora. One week later, Alexander Povetkin edged Marco Huck in an entertaining bout marked by high drama in the final two rounds. Next Saturday, Wladimir Klitschko will defend his belts against Jean-Marc Mormeck.

Klitschko-Mormeck shapes up as a mismatch. Epix boxing acquisitions consultant Roy Langbord acknowledges as much, but says, "The heavyweight division intrigues people, and fighters like the Klitschkos, Povetkin, and Robert Helenius have been available. We don't have anywhere near the budget that HBO and Showtime have to spend on fights. But we've been opportunistic and have been able to buy compelling fights that were overlooked in the U.S. market."

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Six of Epix's eight shows to date (including Klitschko-Mormeck) have revolved around heavyweights. The other two featured James DeGale vs. George Groves and Felix Sturm vs Matthew Macklin. The bouts have been entertaining and, in several instances, notable.

All but two of the cards originated in Germany; the others in England and Finland. The fights are called for Epix from a TV studio in New York off a foreign television feed. The commentating team of Bruce Beck, Freddie Roach, and Dan Rafael does a good job. Chris Mannix serves as an on-site reporter.

Epix televises its fights live on Saturday afternoons (usually around 4:00 or 5:00 PM east coast time). That's a throwback to the era when boxing was an anchor for Saturday afternoon sports programming, most notably on ABC's *Wide World of Sports*.

As a practical matter, Epix gets the fights that HBO and Showtime don't want. It typically pays a license fee in the neighborhood of \$100,000 per show. That means Epix has paid less for all eight of its fight cards combined over the past year than HBO and Showtime often pay for a single telecast. But with judicious buying and wise production decisions, it has put together good shows.

On a shoestring budget, Epix is giving boxing fans a good pair of shoes.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thauser@rcn.com. His most recent book (*Winks and Daggers: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing*) was published by the University of Arkansas Press.

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Radam G says:

Another long, tall, tomato can going for it all. Hit dat sucka with the lightest punch, and he will fall. TIMBBBBBBBBEEEEERRRRR! Holla!