

What Can We Expect From Lampley's "The Fight Game" on HBO?

Written by Michael Woods
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Jim Lampley thought a boxing studio show was a great idea for almost 20 years. The people who needed to get on board with that thinking agreed a little less than a year ago with Lampley, and voila, the wheels which will bring a news-focused half hour, modeled after MSNBC's "The Rachel Maddow Show" were set in motion.

"The Fight Game" will debut on May 12, the week after the Floyd Mayweather-Miguel Cotto fight, and Lampley took some time to tell TSS what viewers can expect from the show in terms of frequency, form and content.

"There will be four of them in the remainder of this year," the ace play-by-play man told me. "It will be an informationally dense half hour, and we'll try to build gradually. We'll experiment a little as we go. We'll determine at the end of the year the schedule for 2013.

"Nothing like this has existed before. But the look and feel if we get what we want will be immediate and newsy. We'll try and present it like a cable news show, serving a 24 hour news cycle. We hope to be as up to date as we can be. There won't be a lot of mystery on what we'll cover...it's a 30 minute boxing periodical. It'll be newsy."

So, we know it won't be the feature-y storytelling you get from 24/7, or 2 Days, or Ring Life, which serve to dig down on the personalities of the men you see doing their thing in the squared circle, and make you care that much more about them and understand what brought them to the sport. Lampley foresees something along the lines of Maddow's program, which if you aren't familiar with it doesn't resemble what you might well assume all cable news shows are: hyper-partisan yapping from over-caffeinated blowhards with an excess of degrees and a lack of real-world knowledge. Maddow, a Rhodes Scholar who takes immense pride in going above and beyond in her research to wrap her brain fully around issues she presents, is an ultra-brainy

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sort who seems to be in the business so she can satisfy her thirst for knowledge, first, and present it to like-minded (or people on the political fence) folks secondarily. (Disclosure: My wife worked for and with her at Air America Radio, and booked guests for the Maddow show at MSNBC for a spell.) Lampley told me that Maddow executive producer Bill Wolff, who worked at ESPN, and on I, Max, Max Kellerman's Fox show, will oversee "The Fight Game," so readers should probably assume Lampley isn't simply offering a vague notion of what his program will be. Lampley, who called Wolff "brilliant," gave another hint about the tone of the show.

"If you watch Rachel, she very carefully marshals info, never really giving direct opinion. She piles up evidence, separates it and catalogs it in a way in which the conclusion is inescapable. I'm a big fan of her approach. We can't duplicate what she does but we can duplicate the honesty, the straight-forward nature of the presentation."

In all likelihood, unless things come together and Mayweather-Pacquiao gets made between May 6-11, the first show will examine the ramifications of the Mayweather-Cotto bout, where the principals go from there. Lampley foresees mixing in HBO personnel like Max Kellerman, Emanuel Steward and the like. He thinks the show will take a look at the issue of drug testing in the sweet science, and the proliferation of titles in each weight class, as well.

Lampley at some will unveil "The Gatti List," a compilation of the warriors who exemplify the late sluggers' MO, which featured will over skill, on many nights, and will laud those that give the fans their money's worth, and then some, in the manner that Gatti, or Diego Corrales did, rather than the way Floyd Mayweather does or Roy Jones did.

All in all, the team assembling the show will be assuming a level of intelligence and knowledge on the part of the viewer, so there will be no dumbing down.

My take: it's about effin time. With the talent HBO has, and the fact that they have like 17 HBO channels to fill with content, I can only wonder why this didn't come to fruition five or more years ago. That said, welcome. Lampley is scary-smart, so I look forward to him getting a larger platform to show that off from. I suspect the program will be influential, perhaps somewhat subtly so, and could at times shift or refine narratives rather than simply report them. Readers, what do you want to see on "The Fight Game?"