

Ex-HBO Exec Abraham Thinks Chance Of Floyd-Manny Is "Zero"

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I get two questions when people become aware that I write about boxing for a living. One, is the sport dead, or dying? Two, will Floyd Mayweather ever fight Manny Pacquiao?

To the first question, I tell people the sport is not dead, that 2.5 million people would buy a pay-per-view priced at \$75 or more if and when Mayweather fights Pacquiao, that that fight would gross a quarter billion dollars in revenue, and that there will be, till the end of times, a market for watching two men fight each other to determine who is the better man and exist as a proxy analogy to all our struggles in life.

To the second question, my answer has varied over the years. A couple years ago, before the aborted negotiation sessions and ludicrous denials of negotiations and mediation attempts and lawsuits and back-and-forth mudslinging in the press and tortured explanations from the principals and their teams, I would tell people that The Fight is up there with death and taxes--unless you are GE, mind you--as a life inevitability. The prospect of grossing so much moolah would force the recalcitrant--and, mind you, I haven't always been certain who the recalcitrant are, or if both Mayweather and Pacquiao don't really want to get 'er done--to drop their excuses and sign on for duty. This is America, after all; it seems like we exist primarily to make money, oftentimes, so I figured too many forces would align themselves and smooth over any too-high hurdles so that any holdout(s), even if that is one of the fighters themselves, would capitulate. As time passed, and the "logic" dispensed by the bizarrely and shamedly hesitant parties involved emerged as less and less credible---Mayweather lobbing accusations of PED usage apparently based on nothing more than hearsay, Pacquiao proclaiming a deal-breaking squeamishness at the idea of having blood samples taken too close to fightnight---my informed opinion was that the fight was still likely to happen, but was no slam dunk. Surely, this being America, money would trump all, and the possibility that so much green would be left on the table would act as a catalyst to bridge any gulfs, I figured. Regular readers know that I have for some time postulated that while the lawsuit which Pacquiao put in motion against Mayweather in late December 2009 for defamation still exists, the likelihood that the two boxers meet in the ring is lessened. But all in all, I have never, ever closed the door on The Fight. But others have closed the door. People with more years in the business, and a deeper understanding of the principals and their crew, and all the various levers of power and trapdoors which could render the superbout a stillborn fetus.

People like Seth Abraham, who ran HBO boxing from 1986-2000. If you are younger, you might not be familiar with the name. But Abraham arguably pushed HBO to push boxing to the extent they do today. They were going to junk the sport in 1978, when he came aboard from MLB, where he was a licensing coordinator. He had them whittle down the number of sports events they showed, and cemented boxing as the top dog at the cabler. I chatted recently with the

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former HBO exec, who left in 1990 for a gig at Madison Square Garden, and has run his own consultant shop, STARSHIP, since 2004. I figured he'd be a great brain to pick, since he was dealt with basically all the people who could make The Fight happen, but no longer has a dog in the hunt, so he'd be more able to offer past-partisan analysis on the subject.

So, Seth, do you think Mayweather-Pacquiao will happen?

"I do not," he said, in a phoner after finishing up a sports business class he teaches at Washington University in St. Louis.

He explained his pessimism. "Floyd believes he's in the conversation about the ten greatest all-time fighters. He believes if he retires with zero defeats, he would be in the top five in history. He doesn't want to jeopardize the history for the money."

Mind you, Abraham has dealt pretty extensively with the boxer formerly known as "Pretty Boy." In 2000, HBO was looking to get Floyd Mayweather back on board at HBO. Floyd had turned down a \$16 million-multi fight package in November 1999, and railed that the offer was a "slave contract" in comparison to the one offered to Naseem Hamed, the cocky Brit who was a poster boy for the cabler at that time. Check back for more from Abraham...

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