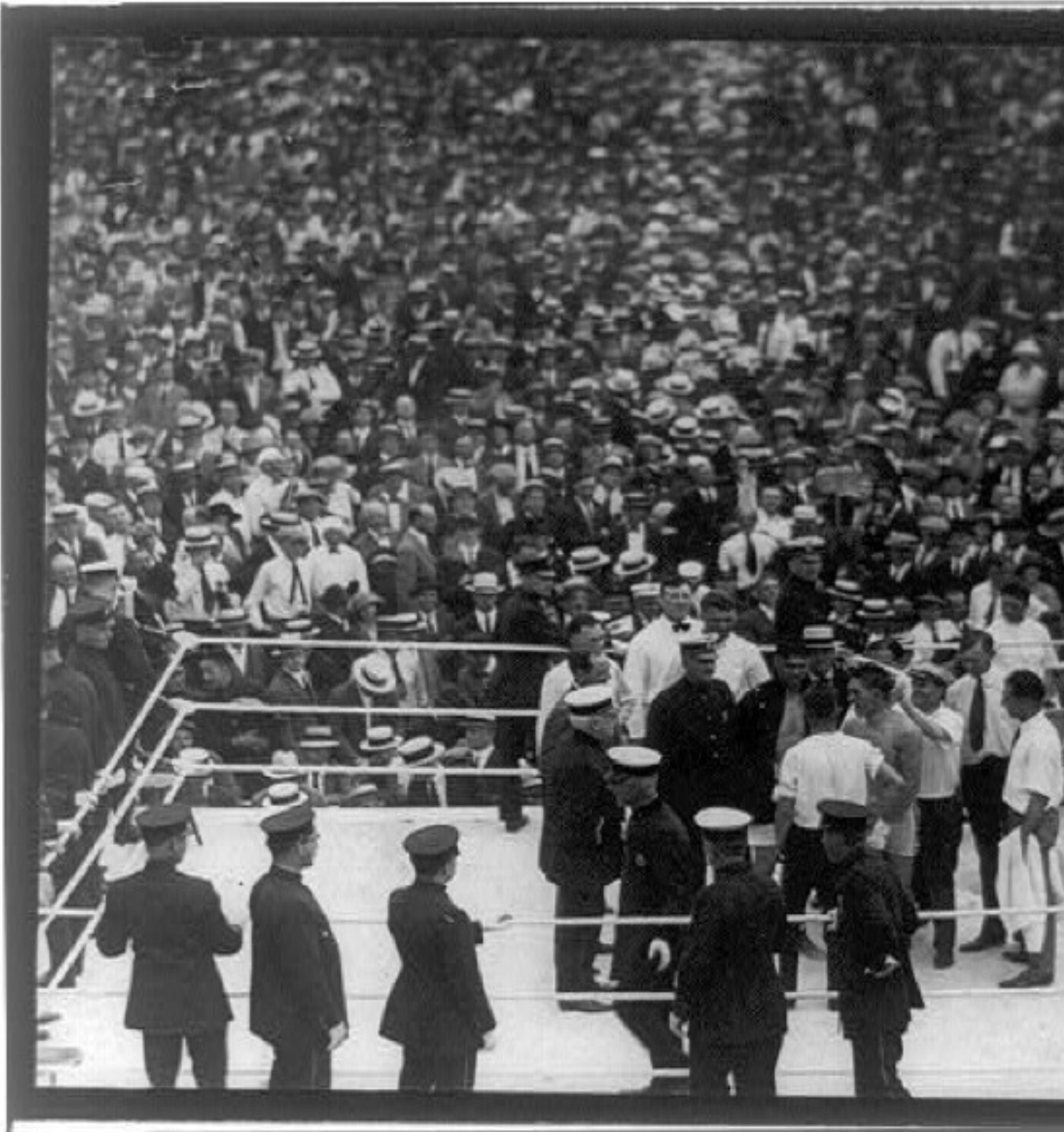


Occupy the Ring

Written by Springs Toledo
Wednesday, 09 May 2012 22:10



“We won’t get involved in the editorial side of rankings,” promised CEO Richard Schaefer when Golden Boy Enterprises purchased The Ring in 2007. Few believed him. I raised an eyebrow.

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At the same time that Schaefer made one promise, Oscar De La Hoya made another. He said that Nigel Collins would stay in his position as editor-in-chief of the magazine. Last summer, Collins cleaned out his desk while De La Hoya cleaned house and moved The Ring from Blue Bell, Pennsylvania to his bathroom in Los Angeles.

One month later a newly-appointed editorial board pledged allegiance to the boss. After Bernard Hopkins lost his title by TKO to Chad Dawson, The Ring broke its own rules, fell in line with Schaefer, and declared that Hopkins was still the champion despite the referee's call. The referee's call was faulty and would later be overturned, but that isn't the point. The point is that The Ring rushed to support a Golden Boy fighter when it would have been perfectly reasonable to wait for the official decision by the California State Athletic Commission.

I raised another eyebrow.

In January, the editorial board decided to remove number one-ranked Marco Huck from the cruiserweight rankings because of what turned out to be a single venture into the heavyweight realm. The next two ranked contenders were moved forward and fought for The Ring championship. This hasty move soon had the editors backpedaling faster than Joey Archer. This spring, Floyd Mayweather stepped up a weight class to challenge Miguel Cotto and was not removed from the welterweight ratings. Why? Editor-in-chief Michael Rosenthal stated the difference as one of "intentions." In other words, had Huck won his heavyweight bout, he may have intended to leave the cruiserweight division "because he can make more money as a heavyweight." But he didn't and so returned to the cruiserweight division, which he also may have intended to do. The Ring "decided against dropping Mayweather because it is clear that he is a welterweight who took the fight with Cotto only because of economics." In other words, "economics" was the magic bullet behind removing Huck and retaining Mayweather. Or was it simply that Mayweather, like Hopkins, is a Golden Boy fighter?

I don't claim to know, but with no more eyebrows to raise it was time to take action.

Some weeks ago, I contacted a member of The Ring Ratings Panel for reassurance. I got that and an invitation to join the panel and see for myself. So I did.

Nineteen days later I resigned.

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The reason I did is that the editorial board, unbeknownst to the ratings panel, reworked The Ring's championship policy and effectively destroyed its purpose and credibility. [See below]

NEW CHAMPIONSHIP POLICY

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways:

- 1. THE RING's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another.*
- 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and either of them fights No. 3, No. 4 or No. 5, the winner may be awarded THE RING belt.*

CHAMPIONSHIP RETENTION

THE RING also wants to encourage its champions to face worthy opponents. With that in mind, here are the six situations in which a champion may lose his belt:

- 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion.*
- 2. The Champion moves to another weight class.*
- 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months.*

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4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight).

5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years.

6. The Champion retires.

The crux of the problem is highlighted in red. The disaster it invites need not be highlighted beyond a glance back at trampled history:

In 1922, the magazine began awarding its tri-colored championship belt to deserving fighters. This continued for nearly 70 years. In 2002, it inaugurated a strict championship policy that offered clarity in the era of alphabet titlists.

On May 3rd, a full ninety years after Nat Fleischer handed The Ring's belt to Jack Dempsey; his revered magazine was taken for a joy ride over a cliff. It landed in the hot mess of alphabet soup. The new championship policy is absurd enough to allow second-ranked Floyd Mayweather to face fifth-ranked Kell Brook in the fall and thus become The Ring's welterweight champion. This doesn't just enable avoidance-prone fighters like Floyd (who is at least half the reason why the most anticipated match-up of the last 25 years isn't happening); it adds to the confusion.

In decrying what they claim as too many vacant championships, the editorial board defends the change with what sounds like a text between network executives and Jose Sulaiman: "We decided to update our Championship Policy," Rosenthal wrote, "to encourage top fighters to face one another and create more championship fights." *More* championship fights? How about *real*

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championship fights?

There were actually more vacancies when Nigel Collins instituted the original policy; though he considered it the lesser evil. “While having 13 of 17 world championships vacant is hardly an ideal situation,” he asserted, “it is far better than having a collection of counterfeit claimants muddling the championship picture.” He was right.

The Ring also announced its intention to strip its champions under certain conditions. This is another stunning about-face. “It is extremely important to keep in mind,” Collins warned in 2002, “that the bedrock of The Ring’s philosophy is that titles can *only* be won or lost in the ring.” So much for that.

Members of The Ring Ratings Panel are resigning. Respected boxing writers are withdrawing recognition of its ratings. Fans are cancelling their subscriptions in protest. After 90 years, the final bell seems to be ringing for The Ring ...soon to be known as the WRING.

Many fans saw this coming. The truest among them stand in a fighter’s stance —with one foot behind, ready for whatever. Boxing history has been battered by golden era racketeers who hid behind front men and continues to reel under new ones hiding behind acronyms; but what happened last week isn’t just another shiner. It’s compromising our vision.

A CLARION CALL

Disorganization and the greed that thrives on that disorganization have reduced the oldest and greatest sport to niche status. The fact that it is still capable of filling arenas and commanding record-breaking pay-per-view numbers is a minor miracle. It testifies to how well boxing captures the human spirit and how much we yearn for demonstrations of that spirit. In the aftermath of dramatic fights, we bask in vicarious glory and forget that we deserve more of them.

We are boxing’s 99%. We are also its financiers. Reforming boxing begins with understanding both the power of that fact and the economics of that fact. It requires action. The sport is simple

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in its form. Its reform can be just as simple:

1. *The true champion of every weight division must be identifiable.* Before that can happen an objective rankings panel must be instituted that is internationally represented, knowledgeable, and independent—free and clear from any involvement with promoters and the so-called sanctioning bodies.

2. *Disempowering those responsible for creating the confusion in which they alone thrive is a duty for everyone who loves the Sweet Science* . It begins with language: Boxing writers support racketeers every time a three-letter acronym appears in their articles. Boxing commentators support racketeers every time a three-letter acronym appears on air. Both should stop mentioning even the status of a fighter as “belt-holder,” “titlist,” etc. Uncrowned boxers are contenders; their status will be determined in the rank accorded them by the international rankings panel. If we want to make boxing great again, we need to stop lying. We need to insist that a “world championship match” is exactly what it professes to be. Eventually, the fighters will realize the worthlessness of those belts and aspire to the only title worthy of our collective attention. The networks will fall in line.

3. *Reform requires vigilance.* Fans have real power at their fingertips; why not aim it at media figures who make a habit of acknowledging acronyms or for that matter, anyone harming the integrity of pure combat for profit or personal motive? Boxing needs watchdogs. Sign up.

If boxing’s 99% —the media and fans— support the idea of one clean system that ranks contenders and identifies the true champions, the scales will tip away from the pimps and toward the public. New initiatives can be instituted to sweep out the refuse and safeguard the majesty of the ring. These initiatives may include the following:

a. *First-ranked contenders must fight second-ranked contenders to fill vacant world championships. Contenders further down the ladder do not constitute the best, and with battles royal on the ash heap of history, why include them? In the event that the first two ranked contenders are unwilling to fight for whatever reason, the rankings panel can conduct an investigation in an effort to uncover which one is 51% or more at fault. That contender risks demotion in the rankings due to his “questionable fighting spirit.” No longer will allowances for third, fourth, and fifth-ranked contenders be warranted once avoidance is unmasked and penalized.*

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b. *Any card on any network that makes a false claim to be a championship bout invites a boycott. Tweet that.*

c. *True champions will be strongly encouraged to demonstrate their authenticity by publically rejecting make-pretend titles once and for all.*

If we've learned nothing else in the past few years, we've learned first-hand the perils of allowing self-interest to run amok in the market place. There is something bigger than currency at stake here. The alphabet boys will never understand it and The Ring forgot which side it's on, but there are others in the red light district of sports—in press row, in the cheap seats—who have it wrapped up in fists. Their power is yet unrealized.

Today, boxing writers, bloggers, commentators, and fans mime a ten count over a magazine that landed a left hook on itself. We're good at that.

We need to do more.

Graphic: Boyle's Thirty Acres, Jersey City, NJ: *Dempsey and Georges Carpentier in arena before fight.* Copyright, 1921, FC Quimby.
Courtesy, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

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[Comment on this article](#)

CPX says:

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Nice article, de la Hoya was one of favourite fighters, loved him but now he drives me a little crazy!

Radam G says:

Wow! What is with this occupying every darn thing. Danggit! Trouble-making 99 percenters. Da one percenters have much luv fo' yo' arses. Hehehehe! "Can we all get along?" Holla!

MisterLee says:

You tell'em Springs! Ring Crapazine losing credibility like Deadre Latrimore!

deepwater says:

your right Radam=occupying everything and war on everything. war on poverty.war on rascism.war on women.war on christians. war on jews.wars on muslims. war on drugs. war on illiteracy.war on obesity.war on fat.war on fast food. race to the top. no child left behind. change. forward. hmmmmm.....occupy starbucks,destroy starbucks. crap on police cars,rapes by wall street,rape free zones at wall street,shut down business. forget the 1% vs 99%. its a diversion . its the government hand in hand with the illegal banksters. protest that

robert619 says:

Good stuff. I hope this takes off, definitely has my support.

kmcc505 says:

Springs has excellent points in this article. I'm hoping for a truly independant rankings system to come together to carry on the original intention of the Ring Magazine. Twenty years from now, when someone asks you who the champion of any given division was, I'm hoping you don't have to ask if they mean "diamond", "regular" or "super" champ.

Matt McGrain says:

It's a very, very good case Springs has come up with here, spelt out in very plain text. I'm a subscriber. Could be time to let that subscription lapse. The question that keeps tugging at me is "why?" The reason Ring champion enjoys such respect - any respect - is that you know he has climbed to the top of a very reasonable set of rankings and/or beaten a fairly crowned champion.

Ring is just a magazine. Why should it be allowed to crown champions? That's the question at the fore now. Unless they are running a ship as tight as a drum they are just another random organisation with enough coin to organise a belt. At the very least it's time to either a) keep a close eye on or b) stop holding up Ring as a paradigm amongst references. The first is tiresome, the second a shame. More than anything this seems poor management. How hard can it be to keep the respect of an industry that doesn't baulk at the biblical connotations of the

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tag-line?

You've walked it like you talk it here Springs, kicking back your invitations to get involved in the ratings. I hope others take notice.

Poor show, and i'm fearful a portent of things to come.

Rant/ramble over.

Matt McGrain says:

...

Boudicca says:

This is pure, bold, unassailable logic. Toledo has constricted the flow of alphabet soup through a clear and narrow straw. Trust him to find the proper implement. His dedication to preserving the integrity of the sport is second to none. The brass should take note and follow suit, though the message is likely to fall on deaf ears until emptier pockets are felt. Even less likely is the chance of one of them reading directly from the source; impossible to imagine Toledo ever appearing among De La Hoya's bathroom literature.

the Roast says:

For the first time in the history of my life, I took a pass on buying the Ring Magazine. Without Nigel Collins and company it just isnt good. Its fluff. For \$8.95 it should be better. KO mag from back in the day with Steve Farhood and Jeff Ryan among others was the best. Are there any other boxing magazines out there?

dino da vinci says:

[QUOTE=the Roast;16250]For the first time in the history of my life, I took a pass on buying the Ring Magazine. Without Nigel Collins and company it just isnt good. Its fluff. For \$8.95 it should be better. KO mag from back in the day with Steve Farhood and Jeff Ryan among others was the best. Are there any other boxing magazines out there?[/QUOTE]

@Roast. I disagree. I had issues with Nigel. I remember reading what now seems like a million years ago something Collins wrote.. It might of been an article, maybe his Boxing Babylon book, don't really recall now. I came away feeling Collins felt fighters should think themselves bulletproof. Or maybe more accurately that unless they were always willing to war, they're to be considered a coward. That said, wasn't it under Collins that Oscar was on the front and back cover of the same issue, with about 8,000 references on the pages in between? Please God, don't make me have to find it. That said, he does have a legion of fans. Love(d) Farhood and Ryan. We are getting old, Roast.