

SUPER BOWL SPECIAL: NY Notes From Hauser

Written by Thomas Hauser
Sunday, 02 February 2014 10:44



Boxing fans know all about the rivalry between Top Rank and Golden Boy. Also, HBO versus Showtime. But in New York, there's another nascent competition: Madison Square Garden versus Barclays Center.

For decades, Madison Square Garden was known as “the Mecca of boxing.” That time is gone. But until recently, The Garden was the premier destination for big fights in The Big Apple. Last year, Barclays challenged that notion.

There were three fight cards at Madison Square Garden in 2013; all of them in the smaller venue known as The Theater, not the main arena. The headline attractions on those cards were:

January 19 – Gennady Golovkin vs. Gabriel Rosado, Orlando Salido vs. Mikey Garcia, Roman Martinez vs. Juan Carlos Burgos

April 20 - Tyson Fury vs. Steve Cunningham, Curtis Stevens vs. Derrick Findley

November 2 – Gennady Golovkin vs. Curtis Stevens, Magomed Abdusalamov vs. Mike Perez

By contrast, there were five fight cards at Barclays Center in 2013:

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March 9 – Bernard Hopkins vs. Tavoris Cloud, Keith Thurman vs. Jan Zaveck

April 27 – Danny Garcia vs. Zab Judah, Peter Quillin vs. Fernando Guerrero

June 22 – Paulie Malignaggi vs. Adrien Broner, Seth Mitchell vs. Johnathon Banks

September 30 – Michael Perez vs. Miguel Zuniga, Sadam Ali vs. Jay Krupp

December 7 – Paulie Malignaggi vs. Zab Judah, Devon Alexander vs. Shawn Porter, Erislandy Lara vs. Austin Trout, Sakio Bika vs. Anthony Dirrell

Golovkin is the best fighter in the group. But Barclays has a credible claim to the more impressive line-up.

2014 began with fight cards at both sites within the span of five days.

First, on January 25, HBO telecast a doubleheader from Madison Square Garden featuring Mikey Garcia vs. Juan Carlos Burgos and Bryant Jennings vs. Artur Szpilka. The opening undercard bout was scheduled for 6:30 PM. The first HBO fight began at ten o'clock. That left three-and-a-half hours for six undercard fights, four of which ended in the first round and one in the second. There was a lot of down time.

Ten years ago, Jennings-Szpilka would have been a mid-level offering on Cedric Kushner's "Heavyweight Explosion" series. Jennings is vying for a rung on the world-class heavyweight ladder. Szpilka is a club fighter. But the excitement generated by Artur's fans gave the contest drama. Bryant tried throughout the bout to load up on a big right hand. Then, late in the going, he realized that the left hook was there for the landing.

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Szpilka has a questionable chin. In round ten, a hook to the jaw deposited Artur on the lowest of the four MSG ring strands. He rose, woozy and unable to defend himself. Referee Mike Ortega, showing poor judgment, instructed the fighters to resume fighting. Then, perhaps remembering what happened to Magomed Abdusalamov in the same ring on November 2, Dr. Barry Jordan (medical director for the New York State Athletic Commission), climbed onto the ring apron and stopped the bout. Whether Jennings is America's next world-class heavyweight or the next Seth Mitchell remains to be seen.

Many of Szpilka's fans left immediately after the bout and the energy in the arena rapidly dissipated. The atmosphere for Garcia-Burgos was sepulchre in nature. Nor did the fight help. Garcia is a patient technically-sound fighter who gets the job done. Burgos is a capable boxer, who didn't have the firepower to hurt Garcia and seemed happy to survive for twelve rounds, collect his money, and go home. The bout had the feel of a sparring session with Garcia winning by scores of 119-109, 118-110, 118-110.

Five nights later, on January 30, the scene moved southeast to Barclays Center, a fifteen-minute ride on the subway from Manhattan to Brooklyn. Fox Sports 1 was the host network. The non-televised undercard featured 5-and-0 vs. 3-and-6, 13-and-0 vs. 7-and-7, and 8-and-0 vs. 4-and-8.

The worst match-up of the evening was 23-and-0 Gary Russell Jr vs. Miguel Tamayo of Mexico. Russell, it appears, is being maneuvered to a belt without being legitimately tested. Tomayo had lost three of his previous four fights with the only win in that span coming against a sub-.500 plodder. Russell-Tomayo might have been designed to make boxing fans eager to see more of Russell. It certainly made them want to see less of Tomayo. A predictable knockout followed.

Then Eddie Gomez (another prospect being carefully groomed) pounded out a workmanlike unanimous decision over Daquan Arnett. Future opponents might take note of the fact that Gomez tends to drop his right hand when he throws his hook up top.

That set the table for the main event: Victor Ortiz vs. Luis Collazo.

Ortiz entered the ring one day short of his twenty-seventh birthday with a 29-4-2 record and widespread doubt regarding his mental fortitude. He'd won only once in the preceding forty

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months (an April 16, 2011, decision over Andre Berto) and was coming off back-to-back knockout losses at the hands of Floyd Mayweather (sucker-punch) and Josesito Lopez (broken jaw).

Collazo, 32 years old, sported a 34-and-5 record and is a faded version of the fighter who lost a razor-thin decision to Ricky Hatton seven years ago and tested Andre Berto three years after that.

Ortiz fought aggressively in round one but lacked the hard edge he'd shown when his career was on-track. Late in round two, the fighters (both southpaws) threw right hooks simultaneously. Collazo's landed. Victor stumbled backward. Luis followed with two glancing blows, and Ortiz went down. Whether Victor could have gotten up is a matter of conjecture. What's clear is that he didn't, nor did he seem to try. He was counted out at 2:59 of the stanza.

Ortiz's vulnerability, both in and out of the ring, makes him a compelling figure. That said; this was the most troubling of his losses. Collazo is not a big puncher and had scored only four knockouts in the previous eight years.

More significantly, Ortiz wasn't taking a beating (as he had in his loss against Marcos Maidana). His jaw wasn't dangerously broken (as it was against Josesito Lopez). If he'd beaten the count, he would have had a full minute to recover. Fighters come back from knockdowns like that to win fights. Indeed, Victor did it against Andre Berto. But that Victor Ortiz exists now only in memory.

Whatever Ortiz once had as a fighter, he doesn't have it anymore. The good part of his career is over. Let's hope that the rest of the end game is short.

Meanwhile, Madison Square Garden has penciled in Gennady Golovkin vs. TBA for The Theater on April 26. And then, it hopes, the big one: Sergio Martinez vs. Miguel Cotto in the main arena on June 7.

As for now, let it be noted that The Theater sold out in sub-freezing temperature on January 25.

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And on January 30, more than 8,000 fans braved the frigid weather to journey to Barclays Center for a night at the fights. Boxing is not dead in New York.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thausen@rcn.com. His most recent book (*Straight Writes and Jabs: An Inside Look at Another Year in Boxing*) has just been published by the University of Arkansas Press.

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amayseng says:

Russell Jr has the skills, but can he apply them to top competition?

That is what we are asking/waiting to see

brownsugar says:

Junior is gifted..

He was almost KO'd by a tomato can and has been brought up slowly as a result. But a lot of fighters have had their bell rung early in their career and have come back as better fighters. Too name a few: Stevenson, Ward, Pascal, Pacman, Ali, the list is almost infinite.

Supposedly Russell is supposed to get the winner of Salido vs Lomanchenko..but there may be too many promotional issues to make that fight happen.... It is time for Russell to step up...nobody is as painfully aware of that than Russell himself.

brownsugar says:

Regarding Ortiz ... Any fighter who hangs around Hollywood, Musical Artists and the limelight too long become soft. Roy Jones being a prime example... Roy was in many rap videos (tried to rap himself)and had a bit part in the Matrix.

Much had been said about Roys quick decent from heavyweight but I believe it was more about the company he was keeping and the extracurricular activities and mindset that lifestyle entails.

The article is on point ...

Hollywood is the anti thesis to someone who participates in a Spartanesque Warrior Sport like

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boxing where discipline is valued over excess.

Radam G says:

Getting your bell rang is a part of boksing. None of the above boxers went six years without fighting a top ten pretender or contender.

Gary Russell Jr is a bit frighten, just as he was in the 2008 O-Games. Changing his stripes is difficult. Holla!

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Radam G says:

Dude was so frighten that his weight suddenly, surprisely zoomed up and he passed out in the hotel room at the O-Games. What a wuzz! Holla!

deepwater2 says:

I went to two cards at the garden and two cards at Barclays. The atmosphere at the garden was much better. Better view at the garden. Fans more into it. Ggg had so many fans it was unbelievable. The polish fans for spiltzka were some of the most enthusiastic I have ever heard. Barclays was decent at times but couldn't match the garden. Also getting to garden is a lot easier since it is at penn station. Barclays has attain lone near the center but you have to walk a couple blocks and the trains don't run to often. It was easy to meet boxers at the garden also.

Carmine Cas says:

Put Russel Jr against Santa Cruz.

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