

A Plea For Better PPV Undercards

Written by Michael Woods

Tuesday, 04 February 2014 13:06



Bob Arum has been doing this since 1966, and has been regarded as the best of breed, the best in the business of late, after pulling away from rival Don King, showing superior stamina and focus while King's empire has eroded into a low rent shell of what it used to be. So really, I get it, who am I to take issue with Arum's recently remark that PPV undercards really don't mean much to the masses, that about 10% of people actually care about anything other than the main event?

Let me answer that...I am part of the 10%.

Actually, let me start off with a respectful critique of Arum's POV by questioning that 10% figure. I'd like to see the focus group and sample size which has pushed Arum to determine that it is a fool's errand to pack an undercard with compelling, meaningful, fan-friendly scraps. As Arum told Yahoo's Kevin Iole last week, "In theory, yes, it makes sense to say, let's go get a lot of good, interesting fights and put them on the [pay-per-view] undercard, but the truth is – and I've been doing this a long, long time – 90 percent of the people don't want to see the undercard and don't care about it. But there is a point to the argument that we should give the other 10 percent something to watch that they'll enjoy, so we decided to try to put together a fun card for them."

One man's definition of "fun" can differ from the others', of course. The undercard, as it looks today, pits Ray Beltran against Rocky Martinez in a lightweight title eliminator, for an NABO crown; Khabib Allakhverdiev versus Jessie Vargas for the WBA super lightweight belt; and Bryan Vasquez against Jose Felix for an interim WBA super featherweight title. Now, I don't have a working crystal ball. I'm tending to think odds are that two of those scraps will be real good rumbles, what with the mix of talent and ferocity in that jumble. But that roster pales in comparison to the main support bout to the last Floyd Mayweather fight. Do you recall the social media buzz which erupted when Golden Boy paired up Danny Garcia and Lucas Matthyse, two name fighters with much higher recognition factors than the crew soldiering on the April 12

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Pacquiao-Bradley II undercard? The undercard tiff overshadowed the Mayweather-Canelo pairing for two straight days. Plus, there was ample activity and chatter among the hardcore fight fans, yes, that 10%, in the weeks leading up to the contracts being made official for that young gun faceoff to reach fruition. And to juice your recall, that Garcia-Matthisse fight had more drama than the main event did, and helped lift up the stature of Garcia to another level. He got some love in the Fight of the Year voting, and his dad did for Trainer of the Year voting in the BWAA awards runoff.

Arum, being a wise sort, makes a fine point when he tells Iole that he sees buildings half empty during the pre main event bouts on PPV cards, and notes that at PPV parties, people are busy shooting the bull and eating and drinking until the big guns step to the ring. He's not wrong. But he could be working to change that dynamic, instead of capitulating to it. The reason disinterest reigns is because fight fans, 100%, have come to expect too much dreck, too many record building bouts, on PPV undercards...and they react by being less than enthused about them. But watch that change if some care and more money is extended on these undercards. Watch the bump to the brand, of Top Rank, of Manny Pacquiao, of HBO, when these undercards get the love they deserve. Watch the buzz on social media when fans Tweet their support and appreciation for getting a great bang for their buck because Top Rank has dumped that old school "only the 10% care" thinking.

I respect Arum's years in the biz, and don't dismiss what his gut, or those focus groups or whatever, tell him...but I'd love for him to embrace a mindsight of being a gamechanger, not someone who accepts a norm simply because that's the way it's always been done. It remains to be seen how it will play out financially, and I think we'll need a good year or five to collect all the returns to know for sure, but the uniformity of the reaction to Vince McMahon's choice to offer his WWE library AND all PPVs to people who pony up a mere \$10 a month spoke loudly to me. The UFC's Dana White called the concept "idiotic," and said McMahon devalued his product, but me, I'm going with the 40 year track record of McMahon over anyone else on this issue. McMahon conjured oodles of buzz and appreciation for his brand, and left all wrestling fans appreciative for the value they will be getting. I dare say he will add to his fan base, because there is little financial downside for a possible WWE consumer to go all in, and sample the fare. A mere \$10 gets you hours and hours of quality product.

McMahon's brand got a massive boost with that move, and I think the brand of all the people involved in the April 12 Pacquiao-Bradley II could too...but only if old guard thinking gets tossed, and a new commitment to quality and value is inserted in its place.

My two cents.

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SouthPawFlo says:

I think if Bob had a deeper stable of fighters he could put on better events....

GBP has a deeper stable that's why they can make better matches.....

Carmine Cas says:

[QUOTE=SouthPawFlo;43507]I think if Bob had a deeper stable of fighters he could put on better events....

GBP has a deeper stable that's why they can make better matches.....[/QUOTE]

That is true, I think so too. But I also think if he had a deeper stable he'd separate them on different ppv cards to maximize ppv revenue.

But I like the idea of what Golden Boy this past September, provide a good quality card. The fans appreciate it, even though \$75 HD was taking advantage of the situation. I like the idea of smaller monthly with access to everything, if everyone does it the more money in the long run but at the same time the casual fan might not be interested in that so I'm a little skeptical and need to more research.

I think GB cares a little bit more about the fans than TR.

The Shadow says:

My theory:

Better undercards help convert casuals into regulars.

Crappy undercards keeps casuals casual.

And that jabroni damn well knows that it's a time-tested method of building opponents to throw him on the undercard to showcase him as a potential opponent for the main event winner.

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amayseng says:

I don't ever recall once in my life of ordering a ppv, or arriving at a friends house for a ppv and just watching the main fight.

I guess I am not the norm.

I watch all the fights.

Even at live events I watch the 4 rounders, hell I even see some amateur fights on real early.

SouthPawFlo says:

When I pay for a \$75PPV I want 3hrs of exciting fights, not just 45mins-1hr....

I heard the undercard for the Bradley vs Pac-man fight, and I wasn't impressed..

Bernie Campbell says:

Im really tired of seeing this guys kisser! whuts he trying to do being the poster boy for ban rpll on for the silver crowd! AKA Burt Reynolds with Aardvark feather harvest! Yea that's the ticket, How bout a profile like Barrymore! Never a Goldwater! Putz! At ease! Grab arms? Simon says Wilder, Kovalov! Ohhhh! You forgot to say Putz! Junior Yeah, Smoke Good!!! Atencion! Pregunta!

Glass Joe says:

I am definitely in the 10%. I was way more interested in the Thurman-Soto-Karass fight than the main event. And Figueroa-Arakawa! Brilliant. I am just as interested in the undercards as I am in the main event, sometimes more so.