

## Pay-Per-Views: LESS IS MORE, Give Our Wallets A Break!

Written by Michael Woods  
Wednesday, 16 April 2014 09:40

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So I clicked the "power" button on my remote control on Saturday night, and brought up the program guide, and scrolled down to the 300s, where the pay-per-view offerings lie.

I went past the true red light district, the filthy titles, and settled on the In Demand region. I found that Manny Pacquiao-Timothy Bradley Top Rank/HBO PPV offering, gulped at the \$69 price tag and pressed "buy and record."

I could have not done that. But I'm a fight fan, and enjoy watching the biggest bouts, and beyond that, I am duty bound to do so, as the editor of TheSweetScience.com. So, really, I had to buy the event. I had to pull the trigger, and I had to swallow the certainty that my cable bill will arrive in three weeks, and go from Elvis 1975 bloated to Rush Limbaugh 2006 bloated.

I won't be happy when USPS drops off that rude mailer, as because I live in NYC, and the cable company I deal with enjoys a near monopoly, and pricing power, my bill, with the premium channels I enjoy, comes to around \$200 a month. That does include a high-speed internet connection. And, if I may further digress, service that is oftentimes lacking. How so, you might ask? Lacking like this....on Sunday night, at about 9:15 PM ET, while counting down to the 2014 premiere of "Mad Men," a fave in this house, the cable box, an HD version which had been installed by a Time Warner Cable technician about three weeks ago, started blinking, the letters BLSTR pulsing, while a strange noise was coming from the box. I thought the thing was re-booting...but oh no. The wife thought she smelled a bit of smoke...and it became clear that the box had simply up and overloaded and fried itself. It was dead dead dead, like the prospect of a Mayweather-Pacquiao clash. Yeah, virtual monopolies, coupled with exorbitant fees! Digression over...Looking on the bright side, the system held long enough for me to watch that

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Pacman PPV, which I did with a pal, the journalist Mark Jacobson, a boxinghead who delivers high quality text to New York Magazine, and Rolling Stone, and has a piece on Adrien Broner coming out in the next Men's Journal. Now, Jacobson proved himself a fine guest, bringing with him some beers to share. I had my number raised to the rafters in '95, after sampling the whole kit 'n' kaboodle, be it liquid or what have you, but the gesture was decent.

Anyway, contrary to what promoters like Bob Arum and Richard Schaefer, the two main drivers of these PPV events, like to say when they are hyping PPVs, I didn't ask Jacobson to pony up, split the bill. I wouldn't do that, out of pride, if for no other reason. My finances aren't of the sort that I NEED help paying for this product, my mind tells me, even if the paltry amount sitting in the IRA would indicate me and this family need to follow a better budgeting plan (and perhaps cross the fingers harder that the stagnant wages we've all enjoyed in recent decades and indeed, downward pressure on wages in the media sector, get a kickstart).

I myself enjoyed the PPV kickoff, that Bryan Vasquez-Jose Felix Jr. bout. Not sure everyone else who ponied up that not inconsiderable fee enjoyed it as much as I did, though, because I know some people involved in Team Vasquez, and thus had something of a vested interest in the outcome. That scrap was one best suited for appreciators of the finer points of ring combat, something Vasquez displayed to the point Roy Jones Jr. was basically gushing over the guy. The next bout, a clash between Jessie Vargas and Khabib Allahkverdiev didn't, frankly, do much for me or Jacobson, who found himself being distracted by my wife, who was querying him about his life, how many kids he has, etc. Vargas leaves me meh, and Khabib seems to possess more in the willingness department than the skill department.

Now, some reading this might want to hop in, and tell me to zip it with the critique of the undercard. They might note that their market research, I mean, their anecdotal evidence suggests that most folks don't care much about the PPV undercard, and simply care about the feature bout. To them I say, zip it.

In my universe, and that's the same universe we all share, a consumer seeks out and damned well deserves to get their money's worth for the entirety of the duration when they buy an experience.

I mean, do you pay your fee to Disney World, and Disney tells you, OK, the first 3/4 of your time here is going to be crappy, or maybe decent, or, if you're lucky, swell? Do you go to a restaurant, and agree that you will be fine with getting a subpar salad and soup, and stale rolls,

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but will give the whole experience an enthusiastic thumbs up, because you're steak was juicy and flavorful? Only if you're a fool...Or you're a steak addict. We're all steak addicts, friends. We have been conditioned to accept soup slop, and salads with Wishbone dressing and iceberg lettuce, and cold rolls, and then cross our fingers, and hope the steak lives up to its high billing.

The "salad" on Saturday night, by the way, was fight between Ray Beltran, a solid boxer who not long ago was doing his thing on ESPN's Friday Night Fights, basically Triple A...which is where I last saw his foe, last-minute replacement Arash Usmanee, who was in over his head, and wasn't able to compete on Beltran's level, which, no offense to Ray, isn't of a superstar plateau. During the Beltran fight, I posed a question to my Twitter followers, wondering what they thought of the PPV undercard. Some liked it, giving it decent marks. I won't joke about how many Heinekens or blunts they'd taken in, instead I will respect their POV. Many others gave the undercard low marks. Some of these folks attached an "I'm mad as hell and won't take it anymore" followup, but more consumers indicated that they have come to expect this low grade entertainment. They have been beaten down by what has become the sad status quo, and exhibit nothing resembling an oppositional defiance to being fed soup from a can with the waiter having stated for the record that a bowl full of bliss would be forthcoming. We, the consumers, the steak addicts, the beaten downs who are too quick to accept the sad status quo, and not stand up for our ourselves, for what we deserve in exchange for our extremely hard earned money, deserve better.

We deserve better undercards, and that goes for the Top Rank presentations, and the Golden Boy presentations, the lot of them. And we deserve to NOT have to dip into our wallets every six weeks to pay extra to watch the best bouts. No, as a subscriber to HBO and Showtime, two "premium" networks, I believe those networks should be offering the best bouts on their channels, not being part of a campaign to collect piles and piles of cash via the pay-per-view model.

Check back for part two, where I will take a closer look at the PPV construction, and argue why ALL involved in the sport, if they do indeed seek the viable long-term health of boxing as a mass audience sport, should agree amongst themselves that there should be no more than one or two pay-per-views annually. I will be peeking into the Forum for responses from our faithful readers, and will incorporate some of the points and insights from responders in the next installment.

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**deepwater2 says:**

I feel you, I have the triple play from Optimum and it adds up. I loved that Vasquez fight ,look forward to seeing him again. My accountant writes off everything, Can't you write off the ppv as a business expense? I won't dish out the 74.99 for the Floyd fight. I will catch it on bootleg internet or a round by round and catch the replay. I will never accept anything less then a perfect steak, I rate the Old Homestead better then Peter Luger and I never thought I would be saying that.

**Skibbz says:**

Fortunately, we have BoxNation... we pay a monthly subscription, and no PPV costs. And we got Buncy!

**Domenic says:**

Garbage PPV undercards is a fait accompli. Thomas Hauser wrote extensively on the subject a few years ago in a year-end piece (more than one from what I recall), and he was spot on. The mid-90's PPV cards were the salad days compared to what you get now. I watched Saturday's fight at a friend's house, and people literally weren't even watching the preliminary fights. They'd walk by, look quickly at the tv, and say quizzically 'this isn't it, right?' It's odd because you'd think boxing, and HBO, would say look, we've got a MASSIVE audience here tonight, so let's put our best foot forward with a terrific card (which could then lead to greater exposure for the fighters involved and future PPV sales, etc), but they just refuse to. The days of RJJ-Hopkins on the undercard of a regular HBO card as dead and buried forever.

**The Shadow says:**

[QUOTE=Skibbz;49508]Fortunately, we have BoxNation... we pay a monthly subscription, and no PPV costs. And we got Buncy![/QUOTE]

I feel if you already pay a premium, PPV should be included. If it was all free TV, then I'd understand. But fans have to pay, what, \$30/month for boxing?

It is a little much. They should revisit the business model.

WWE just released their PPV figures for Wrestlemania after having made all their PPVs available through their network as part of the \$9.99 monthly subscription.

While they still offered PPV through cable providers, they naturally expected that to take a hit.

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While they did take about a 60% hit in PPV buys, they more than made up for it with the subscription, totaling over a million domestic households for Wrestlemania for the first time ever.

They still made their money and then some and fans got Wrestlemania and every PPV, which will still be offered through cable/satellite, for just \$9.99.

More value for fans. More savings for fans. And the big business still wins anyhow.

I think that's now it should be. These guys are much smarter than we are, or at least than I am, so they should be able to make it work.

Get it done.

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Get it done.[/QUOTE]

It's roughly \$20 a month, and for that we get every PPV, almost every fight shown in the country and major cards from around the world. On top of the actual fights there's round the clock programs including documentaries, interviews, boxing talk shows and much much more. It's really a small price to pay for all that they give. If you note that in the UK most people happily shell out for SkyTV/Virgin or BT, then this channel is nothing more to expect from a passionate boxing fan.

Still who isn't happy to pay less for more?

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Yeah, that's what I'm talking about right there! Seems like excellent value.

### **flackoguapo says:**

I really liked this article. I wonder why he had to mention the "blunt" reference? I really do feel that every crack of the internet has a bunch of "stoned thoughts" that just get lost into every field and subject and who knows what happens from there... No offense to anyone that's cannabis friendly, I've just read such in depth things out there sometimes that it reminds me of that "marijuana epiphany" and nothing else.

Anyway, it sucks to pay 60 bucks to watch a fight on already "premium channels. Is it okay to ask some of you guys where you stream your fights? This is my first time posting in a forum so I kind of don't know how the water runs around here or anywhere else really haha..

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I don't think it's a topic we can touch. Kinda puts the site in a tough spot. They get ad money from HBO. If you want to pirate, I'm sure you can figure it out. Or ask Radam, he knows.

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Thank you.. I will try and figure it out. I started using my computer in a recreational way because of boxing and this website in particular so I just wanted to make sure. Thanks again for gaming me up on that though Shadow.

### **Grimm says:**

The problem with streaming isn't finding the places that deliver the goods - it's the army of evil virus that infests your computer when you run into a bad place. Like with porn and gaming sites for children, the masterminds of cyberworld know when they're dealing with people who are ready to take any risks in order to fulfill their needs - such as see their favourite fighters, and thus click on virtually anything that resembles a chance to hit a homerun.

### **amayseng says:**

Man I wish we could get boxnation here in the States...

I already pay for showtime and hbo, bought the pac bradley fight which I enjoyed and will hold out only for

Sergio and Cotto.

No way I am giving money to the Mayweather fight.

### **ArneK. says:**

Amen to Editor Mike: "Give Our Wallets a Break."

Have PPV prices increased faster than inflation? I'm not sure, but the fight that produced the biggest advance buzz of the 1980s, Tyson vs. Spinks in 1988, was priced at \$30-\$35 in the New England market. Those that waited until the final three days paid the higher tariff.

In horseracing, declining revenues led track operators to increase their prices in the form of higher pari-mutuel takeouts. All that did was compound the problem. It resulted in more lost patronage.

I'm sure the PPV executives involved in boxing know more than me when it comes to pricing their merchandise to maximize profitability, but I can't help but think that their "greed" is one big reason why boxing in the U.S. and Canada has slipped out of the mainstream.

### **The Good Doctor says:**

I have to say that I have no bones with what HBO, Showtime, or the PPV monsters are doing at all. There is a simple reason they charge what they do, because we keep paying for it as a public. They know that the public will moan, cry, beg, and whine about the 69.99 Mayweather fight but at the end of the day 1.4 million of us still buy it. So moan, cry, beg, and whine is all we do. I can guarantee you in any business, if people stop patronizing to a point where they don't

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make good money from it, they will change. As I have said in several posts, one of the sad parts of this society is that we do not mobilize for a common cause. We tweet, we talk about it on our time line, we put on a hoodie but by in large we don't DO anything.

I do think we are reaching a point where the beauty of capitalism is going to show up and the usurping of an expensive system that does not please people will be undercut by a better product.

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I do think we are reaching a point where the beauty of capitalism is going to show up and the usurping of an expensive system that does not please people will be undercut by a better product.[/QUOTE]

All the tweeting, sitting on the backside browsing the internet has made the global population much lazier, and more importantly more accepting of what they're given. Those that make the song n dance necessary to bring about change are labelled madmen and scaremongers to be ostracized from the world. Business is big and those in control of the strings only wish to expand their wallets and power. Average Joe on his own or grouped en masse can not have the same effect as he once did.... Starting to sound like one of those mad men myself.

@Aseng it's a cracking deal. Saturday night till Sunday morning i'll be watching many fights on BoxNation, although Buncy does get a bit erratic when the clock reaches 4am and he hasn't had a wink... Still, it adds to the entertainment!

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Do we really know that? It has been years since we as a culture really took a stand on anything. Also, the dollar will always speak loudly, even if the man says nothing. If you look at big business we can ruin a company with our dollar easily if they do not give us what we want and is then proceeded by another option. Look at Research In Motion.

### **deepwater2 says:**

Withhold the money and something might change. The bottom line is whats most important in business.

### **dino da vinci says:**

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Great, great post.