

50 Cent Talks Gamboa, Boxing and First Pitches Gone Awry

Written by Kelsey McCarson
Monday, 23 June 2014 19:39



Recording artist and boxing promoter Curtis Jackson, who entertains audiences under the name 50 Cent, told TSS it's easy for him to promote lightweight Yuriorkis Gamboa because the hard-hitting Cuban has both the technical skill and raw ability to end fights at any moment.

"I'm not selling fighters," 50 told me. "We're selling the excitement surrounding Gamboa!"

Still, I asked Jackson if he felt like it was difficult to sell audiences on a fighter from Cuba. After all, I reasoned, Gamboa's contemporaries Guillermo Rigondeaux and Erislandy Lara have done just about as well as one can do in the sport but have still failed to really resonate with the boxing public.

Jackson wasn't having it.

"You point out Rigondeaux, but you know what? No one who is hardcore into the sport of boxing can point out someone who can beat Rigondeaux. It may not be the most attractive thing to see, but he's a technician. He's going to outsmart the other fighter. You know? I mean, it's tough to reprogram a guy to go get hit a few times or to go through things they don't train to do."

Jackson said it boils down to the boxing culture being racial by nature. In fact, he said that if his fighter, Gamboa, was from Mexico, he'd be as big a star in the sport as Floyd Mayweather.

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"These are some of the top fighters in boxing right now, and because they're Cuban...maybe I'm living in my own little world not looking at ethnicity and just saying great is great. Ethnicity won't save you if you get in there as an opponent to them."

I argued the point a little with him. I said that it wasn't necessarily that they were from Cuba, but rather it was the Cuban fighting style, the one taught in the country's stalwart amateur system, that turned some fight fans off. While some boxing people, like me, appreciate the Cuban fighters for what they are, many folks simply don't want to watch a fighter with such a defensive mindset.

Jackson wasn't buying it.

"They Cuban! They are Cuban," he said with a laugh. "Look, the sport of boxing is very racial. So Mexican fighters will have a huge audience with huge passion connected to the fighters, because culturally the people just embrace the sport."

Jackson put his promoter hat on a bit at this point and talked about the importance of helping a fighter navigate his career no matter what kind of culture he has behind him. He said it was up to a fighter's team to help put him in the best position possible to succeed.

"But when you run into that guy who isn't part of the plan, we can't fight for them--not that night. No matter how much support you might have for them emotionally, you can't help them out."

Since starting SMS Promotions back in 2012, Jackson has worked with Top Rank on several promotions, an interesting choice considering Bob Arum and company are Gamboa's former promoters. Next weekend's bout between Gamboa and Terrence Crawford is such an example. Both promoters are high on their undefeated lightweight and expect their guy to win but still see benefit in working with each other.

Still, Jackson said his working relationship with the company was as good as it can be.

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“Like most promoters, they’ll protect their assets at different points. It’s as good a working relationship as you can actually have.”

I asked whether or not Jackson believed his status as a celebrity might help bring additional eyeballs to both his fighter and the sport in general. I relayed a story to him about a friend of mine named Melissa Bradshaw, a married mother of three from Tyler, Texas.

Melissa doesn’t follow boxing. I’m sure she knows about the existence of Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao, but that’s probably about it. But Melissa has listened to rap music her whole life, artists such as Tupac, Master P and Young Bleed. So Melissa might not know much about boxing, but she knows a heck of a lot about 50 Cent.

I asked Jackson how to sell someone like Melissa on the sport.

“All I do is tell her I’m connected to it and invested in it, and she should actually take a look at it...just having something that she does relate to be connected to it would make [boxing] more interesting to her than [having] nothing connected. So the fighter who isn’t connected to SMS Promotions and isn’t connected to 50 Cent, she has zero interest in.”

So Jackson believes he can help bring more relevance to the sport among the mainstream crowd?

“Of course. It works, and it brings additional relevance to the sport.”

But Jackson recognized he can only help get people to the door. Once there, he said it was the fighters who have to do something worth watching.

Jackson said Gamboa was up to the task.

First Pitch Blues

In May, Jackson was invited to throw out the first pitch for the New York Mets. It went just about as poorly as any first pitch has ever gone. Jackson didn't come anywhere close to the plate. It was as if he was aiming sideways or something. If you missed it, you can check it out [here](#) . It's pretty funny.

{youtube}LNAKTAatMLhY{/youtube}

So what happened, 50 Cent?

“Oh...um...it slipped.”

Jackson was good natured about it. He said he had practiced the pitch beforehand but let his nerves get the best of him.

“I did pretty well when it didn't mean anything. And then you come in front of the audience and everybody is there and you go to throw the ball and it slipped. If I threw the ball four or five more times, you'd see me throw the ball over the plate four or five more times.”

So even 50 Cent gets nervous performing in front of a stadium full of people?

“Of course I'm nervous in front of a stadium full of people! You don't actually throw the ball in front of a stadium front of people, do you?”

I told him I don't, but that I also wasn't used to performing in front of a stadium full of people the

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way he was because of his music career.

“Yeah, but I’m not pitching in a professional baseball game!”

Fair enough.

Andre Dirrell Update

Jackson said fans could expect to see super middleweight Andre Dirrell back inside the ring in the near future. He would not specify the exact timing of the fight or an opponent, but indicated it would be within the next few months.

“Andre will be back in the ring shortly. I’m excited to see him move forward in his career and get things going. Sometimes, there doesn’t have to be anything in the way. Sometimes the guys will be in their own way. I think you should expect to see him shortly. I know he’s back actively training.”

Kelsey McCarson contributes to The Sweet Science, Boxing Channel and Bleacher Report. To read more from his discussion with 50 Cent, click [here](#).

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brownsugar says:

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Interesting and challenging interview.

I'd like to see Fifty and Gamboa succeed this weekend but the odds are not stacked in their favor.

Kotelnic had to retire because Don King wouldnt get him fights.

I hope this isnt Dirrell's fate.

Dirrell used to be a terrific prospect. It was dissappointing to see him benched because of a head trauma.

thegreyman says:

After I saw him in Scotland, I have every faith that Crawford will pull this off. He's easily one of the smoothest lightweights active today.

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