

Written by Springs Toledo
Monday, 21 July 2014 19:05



In 1988, Sugar Ray Leonard defeated Donny Lalonde and was handed two world championships for the price of none. HBO's Larry Merchant sniffed at this. After a post-fight studio discussion with Leonard, he turned to us. "You may have noticed I made no reference to Sugar Ray Leonard winning his fourth and fifth world championships. This may be the sincerest form of flattery because the promoters have invented three titles for every two pounds. The fallout is that the word 'champion' means less than the fighter, who is or isn't one."

It's an old complaint, but the problem has become worse —exponentially worse. The sanctioning bodies are actively inventing new championships to increase their ill-gotten gains and thrive in the confusion. "These organizations hand out belts like business cards," sniffed Showtime's Mauro Ranallo last Saturday night. Boxing's appeal has suffered as a result. The U.S. has bad indicators in sports bars where boxing never comes up and on barber shop walls that display no autographed 8x10s that say "keep punching." Last week I was on Boylston Street in Boston looking for a little hope. I reached out to a fellow citizen. "Ten bucks if you can tell me who the middleweight champion of the world is." I held up a sawbuck between two fingers. "Oh man," he said, tapping his chin. I offered a hint. "He's Puerto Rican, bald, and tattooed like a sideshow. Throws left hooks." Silence. Then a far-away look. "...I remember when Hagler was champ," he said.

The Historic Fifth Crown: Mayweather vs. Pacquiao, 2015

Written by Springs Toledo
Monday, 21 July 2014 19:05

Mayor Tom Menino didn't. After the Red Sox won the World Series and the Patriots won the Super Bowl in 2004, Menino referred to Boston as "The City of Champions" and the people of Brockton, an economically-distressed city twenty-five miles south, came out swinging. They had laid claim to that title long ago, in the name of favorite sons Rocky Marciano and Marvelous Marvin Hagler. One Brockton resident was irate enough to challenge the rotund mayor to a boxing match, in the name of yesterday.

"The sweet science," said A.J. Liebling, "is joined onto the past like a man's arm is to his shoulder." We look behind us, and while that's always advisable in the red-light district, it also makes sense in a sport that builds so directly on the past. Our fighters, hallowed be thy names, are not only strong-willed athletes, but libraries of accumulated ring knowledge. When those who inspire us the most die, they won't be found moldering under crabgrass in some out-of-the-way cemetery like the rest of us. We recast them into statues, larger than life and forever young, standing guard in their old neighborhoods like Achilles in Corfu.

Some of them are kings.

We look behind us to see, what, if not successions of warring kings?

"We know who the real fighters are," Merchant said at the end of the Leonard-Lalonde broadcast. We no longer know who the real champions are.

It's the boxing historians, the independent specialists, who should have answers. There's squabbling among them to be sure, but they are more relevant now than ever before. They'll tell you Ray Leonard is a three-division king; no more, no less. They'll also tell you only two have conquered four weight divisions, and they happen to be the top two welterweights in the world today.

HISTORY, WITH AN ASTERISK

The Historic Fifth Crown: Mayweather vs. Pacquiao, 2015

Written by Springs Toledo
Monday, 21 July 2014 19:05

In 1937-1938, when Henry Armstrong stormed the featherweight, lightweight, and welterweight divisions inside of ten months, there were only eight divisions recognized. We call them “glamour divisions” and Armstrong held three of their crowns simultaneously. Only Bob Fitzsimmons matched this achievement (middleweight, 1891; heavyweight, 1897; light heavyweight, 1903), though it took him nearly thirteen years. No one else has taken more than two of those eight crowns; not even Sugar Ray Robinson, though it was only outside interference that stopped him. In July 1941, he easily defeated the first-rated lightweight in the world only to be left out in the cold when the lightweight king gave the man he defeated a title shot. In June 1952, he made a grab for the light heavyweight crown but was done in by heat prostration in a ring that would reach over 100 degrees under the lights. “God beat me!” he said afterwards in his dressing room, in his delirium. Think about that. Robinson, a welterweight and middleweight king, would have conquered *four* glamour divisions (a forty-pound span) had fate merely smirked at him.

Fate has been one big smiley-face for Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Manny Pacquiao. Between Armstrong’s reign in 1938 and Armstrong’s death in 1988, the number of crowns available jumped from 8 to 17. The invention and re-activation of in-between and junior divisions, some of which are only four pounds apart, has primrosed the paths to their crowns.

Now something unprecedented is within their reach; something that outshines the tin belts around it like the Nevada sun outshines dashboard lights in a car going nowhere: the fifth crown. If mainstream sports media picks up on it and is clear about what it means, it could spark something of a renaissance. It could return boxing to front-page news.

To lay hands on it, Mayweather must fight Jr. welterweight king Danny Garcia at 140 or middleweight king Miguel Cotto at 160. If he is serious about his legacy and stops confusing grandeur with grudges, he will come to terms with Top Rank and challenge Cotto. The middleweight crown would not only be his fifth, it would enshrine him alongside Armstrong and Fitzsimmons as one of only three glamour-division kings in the record books.

Pacquiao must fight Mayweather at welterweight or Jr. middleweight, or stablemate Cotto at middleweight. He therefore has three paths by which he can seize his fifth crown, two of which will see history’s glamour-division kings become a trinity of diversity. The fact that the Filipino’s first crown was at flyweight, fifty pounds south of middleweight, would make such an achievement as remarkable as Armstrong’s, and that’s nothing to sniff at.

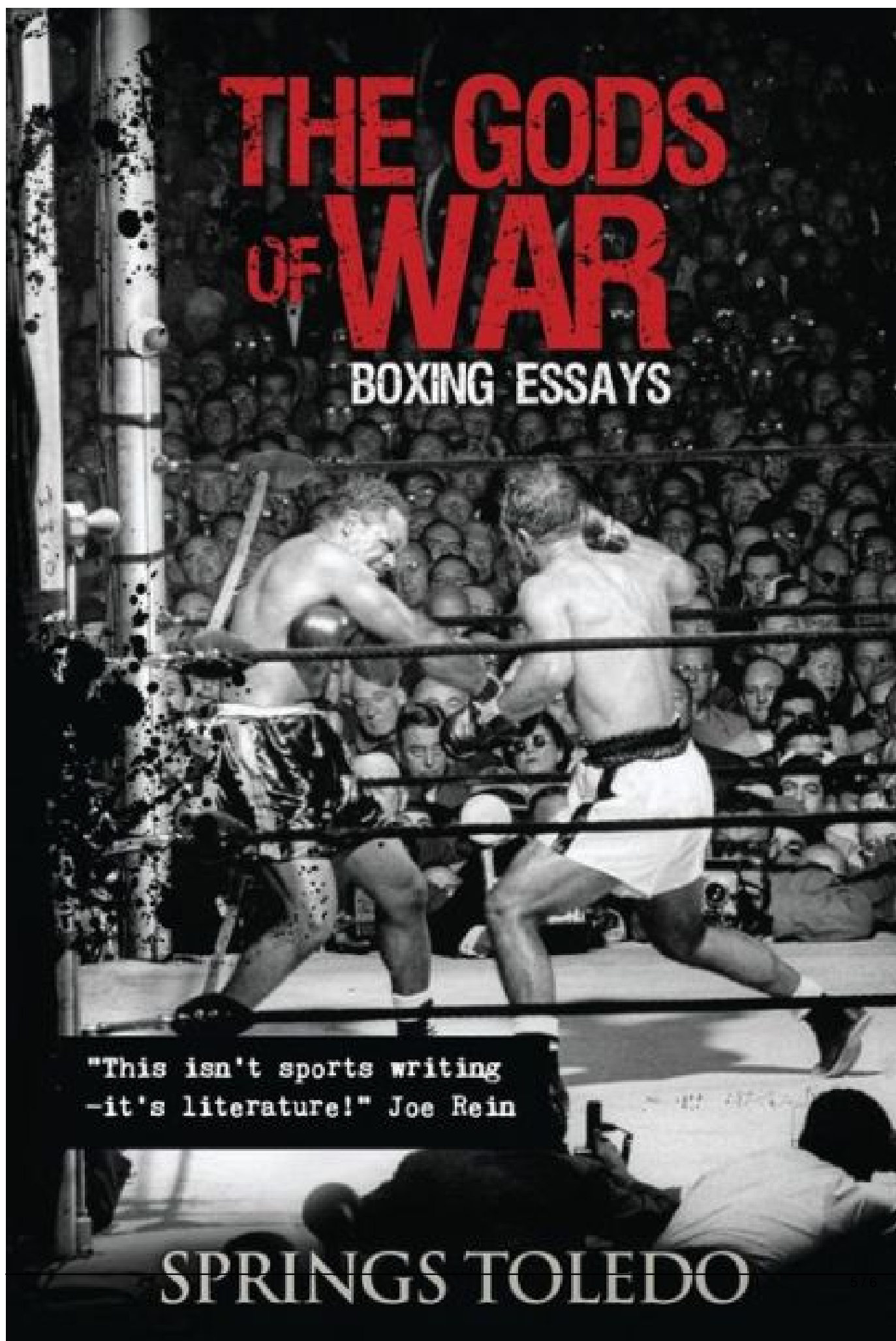
The Historic Fifth Crown: Mayweather vs. Pacquiao, 2015

Written by Springs Toledo
Monday, 21 July 2014 19:05

Never mind the buzz leaking out of Mayweather's camp about his secret plan "to fight Pacquiao next year" —they're squaring off already. The question is which will face and defeat the right opponent in the right weight class, and do it first. That's front-page news.

Expect *Mayweather vs. Pacquiao Redux* in 2015.

The Mayweather/Pacquiao graphic is the work of Cameron Burns of Newcastle, Australia.



THE GODS OF WAR

BOXING ESSAYS

"This isn't sports writing
-it's literature!" Joe Rein

SPRINGS TOLEDO

The Historic Fifth Crown: Mayweather vs. Pacquiao, 2015

Written by Springs Toledo
Monday, 21 July 2014 19:05

