

Oh HBO, What Are You Doing To Sergio Martinez? BORGES

Written by Ron Borges
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The best and the worst in boxing will be on display at the MGM at Foxwoods Saturday night when middleweight champion Sergio Martinez faces former junior middleweight champion Sergiy Dinziruk.

Martinez will be fighting not only for himself but also for 13-year-old Monique McClain, a seventh-grader from Woodrow Wilson Middle School in Middletown, Conn. whose story he became aware of once he reached Foxwoods. Learning that McClain had been forced to leave school in January as a result of incessant bullying by some classmates, Martinez not only agreed to visit with the young girl but to also, in a sense, fight for her.

According to the Middletown Press, the Middletown Board of Education has thus far refused to provide her with a tutor or transfer her to a different school district. Before the final press conference, Martinez invited McClain, her mother and her grandmother to lunch and then introduced them at the press conference, saying at one point he was once the victim of bullying growing up in Argentina himself.

According to the story, the bullying began when McClain showed up at school in September with her hair braided. That anyone should care how someone wears their hair is ridiculous which made it fitting that Martinez would fight for her cause because, well, it's ridiculous that Martinez has himself been bullied into having to fight Dinziruk one fight after having knocked out Paul Williams in spectacular fashion.

That one-punch demolition made Martinez an instant star and should have led him to the kind of follow up fight that might cement his name into the minds of the sport's fans. But, the story goes, HBO had other ideas.

The network's long-respected boxing franchise is in sad disarray these days, having lost Manny Pacquiao's May 7 fight with Shane Mosley to SHOWTIME and having wasted multi-millions on boring fighters and bad matches. Forcing Martinez to fight the former junior middleweight champion is only the latest – and far from the worst – example of the cable giants inability to know a good fight from a bad one or who to promote and who to ignore.

Martinez was forced to give up the WBC title when HBO said it would only accept the unknown

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Dzinziruk as his next opponent even though he had a mandatory challenge he had to make to retain the WBC title against Sebastian Zbik. Why, you ask, might HBO take such a position when Martinez has the potential to become a star and Dzinziruk is the kind of defensive southpaw who doesn't make good fights?

Business, that's why. As part of a deal made with promoter Gary Shaw to bring them Timothy Bradley, HBO agreed to a deal that also guaranteed Dzinziruk a date on HBO and the decision was made that this would be the way to fulfill it.

Never mind that Dzinziruk had done nothing as a middleweight to deserve a title fight. Never mind that he is a southpaw and a defensive one to boot, and generally two southpaws make for ugly fights. Martinez deserved better after delivering one of HBO's most spectacular recent moments by destroying Williams in a rematch.

Of course, maybe that was part of the problem too because Williams is one of many fighters managed by Al Haymon, a man who has developed an almost Svengali-like control of HBO's boxing budget. Martinez only got a rematch because their first fight was rife with controversy and he ended both that and the myth of Williams' skills with one crushing shot to the mandible. Al Haymon could not have been happy about that and the way HBO matched Martinez it wouldn't appear it was either.

Dzinziruk's style, to be kind, is unpleasant to watch and unlikely to make what HBO's executives seem to care least about these days – a good fight. That is not to say he is without skills. He is in fact difficult to deal with. He's also difficult to watch. So why would you force a potential bright young star to fight him?

The likelihood HBO Sports president Ross Greenberg or chief aid Kery Davis could identify Dzinziruk in a lineup of one is slim. The likelihood they ever sat at ringside and watched him fight even less so. Yet they would hear of no one else and so Martinez was bullied into a match most boxing people assume will not be enjoyable television.

That problem is compounded by the fact SHOWTIME has counter-programming on its pay-per-view arm with a fight that figures to be, if nothing else, a fight for as long as it lasts when Miguel Cotto squares off with mercurial but at least aggressive Ricardo Mayorga. Bad enough Martinez must overcome counter-programming but to have to do it against someone it will be most difficult to look good against just to pay off an HBO "debt" is another reminder of how boxing got itself marginalized.

Still, Martinez has acquitted himself well. He has praised Dzinziruk, insisting, "HBO got the best available opponent because he has the credentials. Nobody forced me to fight. I only want to fight the best.

"I've fought similar guys several times in Europe. The problem is no press in America know them. He will use all his intelligence against me and wait for me to make a mistake to counterpunch."

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That, of course, is the problem. He waits and waits and waits. And while he's waiting not much is happening and pretty soon fans are nodding off. Yet Martinez said none of that nor did he complain about being forced to give up the WBC title to earn a payday on HBO.

These titles may not mean anything to the people who write the checks (except when it's advantageous to say they do) but they do mean something to fighters, who grew up dreaming of wearing one of their belts.

Technically he's fighting for the "Diamond Belt" which is just another way for the WBC to get a sanction fee. He's also still middleweight champion in the minds of anyone who knows anything about this.

But he also was the victim of a bully, just like little Monique McClain. Maybe that's why Martinez made a public service announcement against bullying which is on YouTube and made the young girl his ringside guest.

She'll be there tonight watching the 2010 Fighter of the Year and the author of the Knockout of the Year in a fight he was, in a way, bullied into business considerations beyond his control. Martinez lost the title belt he'd earned and didn't get the type of opponent he deserved but there's a lesson for Monique here too because there he'll be. Doing what she's been forced to do as well.

Fighting back against forces attacking him for no real reason.

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Radam G says:

Some people will go for every and any thing. The Humbuggery, Butspittin' Operation -- HBO -- know what time it is. So do Team Martinez and the We Be Collecting -- WBC, which has openly said that this is not considered a title bout and the WBC title of his, which it stripped and ripped, will not be contested because Martinez is a Diamond Belt holder. WTF! And according to the WBC, this now-titleless pugilist is honored in such a way, that nobody can ever challenge him for his belt. Presidents for life have and are getting their arses ran out of offices all over da world, but da BIG, OLE, SUPERBAD We Be Collecting --WBC -- of sanctioning fees, can create a-champion-for-life position and HBO televises it without one iota of shame. Da sucka has no more game. Is LAME! And has lost its FAME!

The economy is bad. The fanfaronades won't be complaining about quality because they are broke. And their broke arses are going to be at home watching. After all, they won't have to pay a half of 100 bucks. HBO -- "WE got 'em. And an optical illusion to put on em -- an alphabet-named bum, and a long-in-the-tooth A-minus pugilist who beat a drunk and kayoed a long, tall chump, who was hyped-up bunk." Holla!

brownsugar says:

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Regardless of the machinations,.. manipulations,.. covert promises and diabolical allegiances... Dzinziruk vs Martinez is probably the most valid title fight we've had this year... No#1 at 154 meets No#1 at 160....So I have to disagree with the author just a little bit.... Dzinz is not some manufactured, propped-up sanctioning-body-favorite who's been held safe and secure.....Safely preserved by powerfull benefactors until his day of reckoning.. Dzinz is one of the nobodies who's blessed with elite talent but hasn't had the necessary exposure to become a household name even to the hardcore...

His dispute and eventual escape from the powerful european promoter Universum caused him to be one of the most inactive champs in the 154lb division... But he's blessed with God-Given talent and has mastered the TSS in it's most technical variation. You don't have to be Bert Sugar or Michael Woods to appreciate how well schooled Dzinz is.

The former "Most Feared Man on the Planet" Paul Williams was put in a similar situation after Martinez/Williams #1.....Although Williams never publically expresses fear, it was clear that he didn't want to cross Martinez's path anytime soon as he began to call out every other fighter under the sun (except Dzinz who Paul conveniently labeled a nobody) Al Haymons' Svengali like grip on HBO was a non-factor when the cable giant remained steadfast and dropped the bottom line... "it's either Martinez or you'll never work in this town again"... after a couple months of dithering around,.. Paul,.. not willing to lose face and by reason of his larger-than-life moniker("the most feared"),.. finally accepted... Martinez licking his chops hungrily like an insatiable wolf who gets a second chance at the prey who got away was as happy as Martin Sheen at porn convention after-party.

The bum in alley once said "what goes around comes around" as the restaraunt employee emptied a barrell of trash into his favorite dumpster.... Not that Martinez is going to lose tonight.... he may,.. he may not,... but now he's facing a very keen challenge himself.... He's in the hotseat of having to be at his best yet again... Regardless of how we got here,.. a real fight developed somewhere along he way. And we owe it to the indecipherably elaborate business of boxing that cruises on it's merry way like career politicians spinning issues out of bullshit and promises out of dollars.