Written by Eric Raskin
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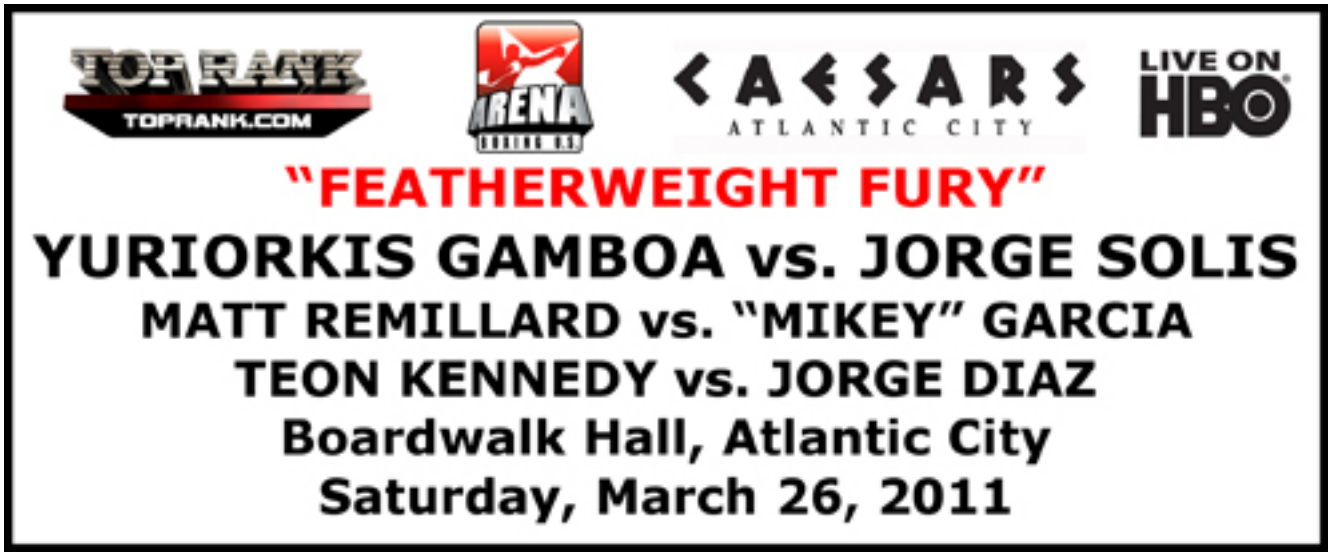

Yuriorkis Gamboa fights on HBO this Saturday night from Atlantic City. Juan Manuel Lopez fights on Showtime on April 16 from Bayamon, Puerto Rico.

As you probably deduced based on the inconsistent dates, locations, and networks, they are not fighting each other.

There are fights that fans are dying to see, fights that make fans' stomachs turn, and fights in between the two extremes that are perfectly acceptable but impossible to get pumped for. That last description fits these upcoming bouts, Gamboa vs. Jorge Solis and Lopez vs. Orlando Salido. You shrug your shoulders, you plan to tune in or at least set the DVR … but you find yourself looking past these fights and ahead to an eventual meeting of the winners.

And you ask, "When is Gamboa-Lopez going to happen?"

Or, if you're the worrying type, you remove the word "when."

For about the past year, Top Rank President Bob Arum has taken heat from the hardcore fight fans and boxing media for delaying this natural battle for supremacy at 126 pounds. Arum hears what these boxing enthusiasts are saying. He hears, but, for better or worse, he isn't listening. He's sticking to his plan. And he busted out a metaphor straight from the Teddy Atlas cookbook—err, playbook—to explain his philosophy to TheSweetScience.com last week.

"You don't want to pull the cake out of the oven before it's baked. You gotta wait for the cake to bake," Arum said. "You gotta be patient. So I'm going to be patient with this, and when it happens, it's going to be as big a blockbuster as it can be.

"To do a successful event, we have to reach more than just the boxing public. With the boxing public, there is a demand for these fights to take place sooner rather than later because boxing

people know how good of a fight it is and they can't wait to see that kind of matchup. I'm aware of that. But that's not what pays the bills for these fighters. Otherwise, what the hell do they need me for? My job is to maximize their revenues; it's a business."

The Lopez-Gamboa showdown appeared to be imminent dating back to October 10, 2009, when Gamboa blew past Whyber Garcia and Lopez barely survived Rogers Mtagwa in co-featured bouts on the same Madison Square Garden card. We thought maybe a meeting of the two twentysomething uber-talents would be next—especially since Lopez's unexpected struggle with Mtagwa served as a reminder of the danger in slowly building toward a fight. But Arum had some choice words for those demanding the bout at the postfight presser, and here we are a year and a half later, still building.

It's frustrating for the hardcore fan, but talking to Arum, you get where he's coming from. And you especially get it when you look at what happened in January with Timothy Bradley vs. Devon Alexander.

"That is the perfect, perfect example!" Arum insisted. "HBO couldn't wait to do that fight, and I suppose that's part of being a premium network, you try to put on what you think is the best fight. But it doesn't really build a career. If you'd given that fight another year, it wouldn't have changed how the fight was fought, of course, but it would have been a major, major event. Instead, it was not a major event and it disappointed with the ratings. It was an abysmal flop for what the promise was."

All of that analysis is colored by Arum's not-so-impartial opinion. It could be argued that the ratings numbers actually weren't bad; Bradley-Alexander reportedly attracted a 2.3 rating, which exceeded all but one HBO boxing broadcast from 2010. But according to boxing writer Thomas Hauser, inside sources said HBO executives were hoping for a 4.0 rating. And given the money committed to the fight and the time spent hyping it as one of the biggest possible fights in the sport, a 2.3 rating is not the success it would be if, say, this weekend's Gamboa-Solis fight pulls in that number.

Bradley vs. Alexander made all the sense in the world for serious fight fans. It paired two of the top three fighters in the talent-rich 140-pound division and it positioned the winner, Bradley, to face Amir Khan for undisputed rulership of the weight class this summer. Why wouldn't we want to see this?

But there's another side to the equation: the business side. Bradley-Alexander was billed as "The Super Fight" but it featured no superstars, and it drew an announced crowd of 6,247 to a stadium that packed more than 93,000 for WrestleMania III. Even had the fight produced Vazquez-Marquez-like fireworks (which it most certainly did not) and been an artistic success, it would have been deemed a commercial flop.

That's what Arum is hoping to avoid with Lopez-Gamboa. He wants both fighters to build large enough followings for the fight to score big on pay-per-view and earn them each multiple millions of dollars (while also maximizing Top Rank's take, of course). But there are three dangers to playing the waiting game:

1) Somebody loses. When you're talking about two undefeated fighters, one of them letting his "O" go is no small deal from a marketing perspective.

2) Somebody defects to another promoter. Arum was reminded of this danger just last week, when Nonito Donaire suddenly bolted for Golden Boy (legal wrangling pending). Who's to say Gamboa or Lopez won't get fed up waiting for the big fight and start pursuing other promotional options?

3) The public's interest starts to decline. Think about it: Doesn't it feel like the hardcore boxing community is buzzing about Gamboa-Lopez a little less than it was a year ago? After Donaire dented Fernando Montiel's cranium, some of the buzz shifted to Donaire vs. Gamboa or Donaire vs. Lopez. Obviously, if Donaire is with GBP, then neither of those fights can realistically be expected to happen. But the fact remains that some hardcore fans and writers proved immediately willing to shift their gaze away from the Lopez-Gamboa fight.

This is precisely what Arum thinks is about to happen with Manny Pacquiao vs. Floyd Mayweather, and he went back to his cake metaphor to illustrate it.

"The cake was baked for that fight over a year ago," Arum said. "And there will come a point in time when the cake gets stale. Is it stale yet? Probably not. But we're approaching a point with the public where they're just so fed up contemplating that fight that it's akin to the cake getting stale."

Gamboa vs. Lopez is by no means getting stale yet. But it will eventually, and it's a complicated judgment call that Arum has to make, determining that moment when the interest of the hardcore fans and the interest of the general public are at a collective peak. He said he believes "when it happens, I'll know."

Until then, we get fights like Gamboa-Solis and Lopez-Salido. They're not sexy fights. They're not even-money fights on paper. But they are important fights—provided they're leading us somewhere. Arum just needs the right guys to win and keep winning and remain in his promotional stable until both guys have begun to cross over beyond the hardcore boxing fan.

Piece of cake.

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brownsugar says:

(nice article)****Arums' success and knowlege of promoting cannot be disputed, but his

occasional lack of judgement and restraint is an indictment against his superficial facade of integrity. I was surprised when Arum unleashed a personal tirade against Donaire for leaving Top Rank by attempting to use the backroom, watercooler gossip of women to fuel and promote discord between Donaire, Pac, and the Filipino people. Does he really think American fans care about what Donaires wife may or maynot have said about Pac's wifes fashion choices??... The only way Donaire will be left in the cold is if his legal dispute with Top Rank takes longer to resolve than expected... Donaire himself has said he's not ready to take the plunge into the featherweight ranks...By time he does Lopez and Gamboa will already be campaigning as junior lightweights anyway... the Gamboa vs Lopez scenario reminds me of my military days,... we'd sail to countries like New Zealand, Austrailia, Europe and Africa and find the people listening to American music that was 3years old and doing outdated dances that were long forgotten in the United States... granted that was way before the internet... but it's reminiscent of what's happening here... This fight is already growing stale for me as there's already another "Super" Cuban rising to the top of the featherweight scene by the name of Rigondeau ..his continued success could change the trajectory of what fans want to see if the fight takes too long to manifest... Not saying I wouldn't watch Gamboa vs Lopez anyday of the week,.. but there is so much more on the horizon now than there was 2 years ago,... boxing goodness is already beginning to burst forth in the form of some outstanding Easterblock entrants like middleweights Pirog, Korobav and Golovkin,.. Junior Middleweight Lara is streaking for a tiltle fight,.., and light heavyweight Ismayl Sillakh shadow will soon loom over that division.... and many many more examples I could make but there's not enough space to do so... ...Where Lopez vs Gamboa had my total attention 2 years ago,.. that same fight is only a small part of the total picture today as boxing continues to heal and repair itself with an enslaught of new prospects and possibilities.. While Arum holds one fight in randsom,.. a dozen more stars are being born and confirmed in the same incubation period... Arum can do what he wants as far as I'm concerned because the sport is on the verge of becoming "L-i-m-i-t-l-e-s-s" as future attractions begin to grow exponentially. And barring the fall of civilization the fans will be the recipients of more challenging entertainment than ever.