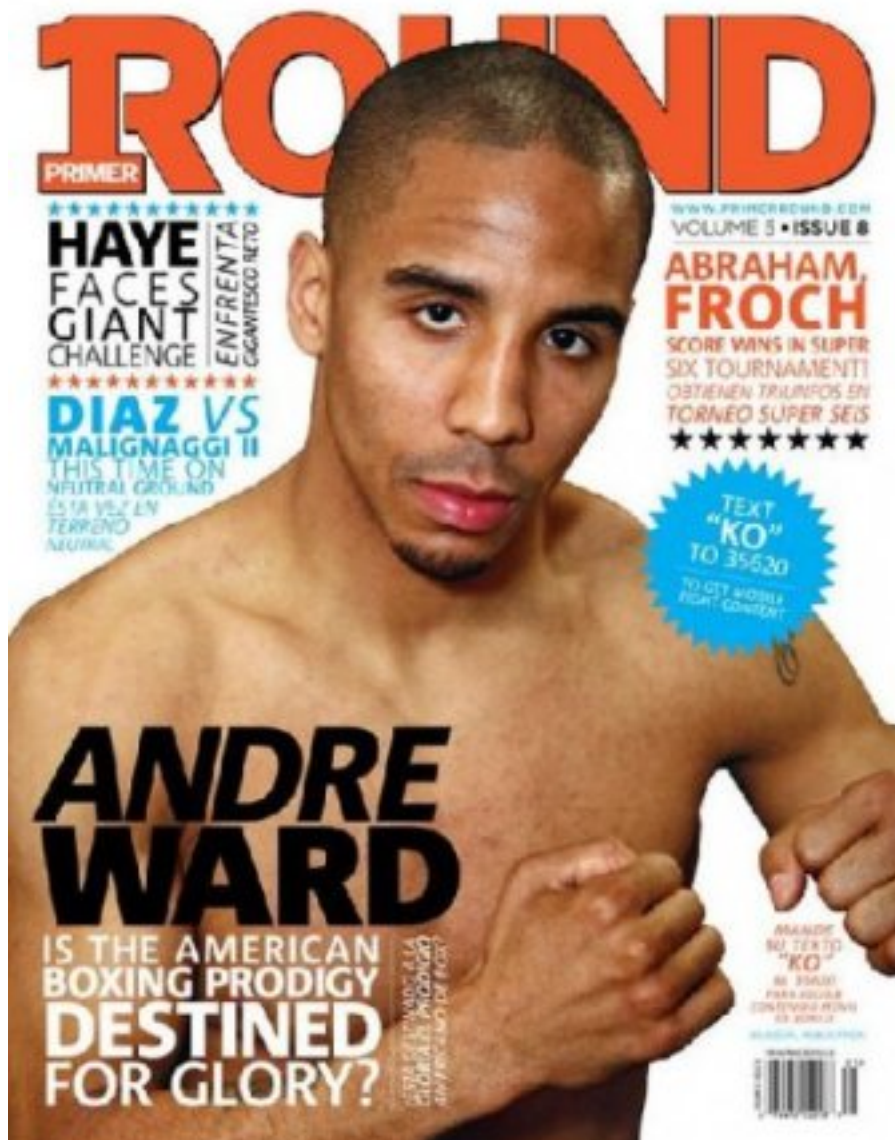


Why Don't All Boxing Fans Appreciate the Skills Of Andre Ward, And Mayweather?

Written by Raymond Markarian
Friday, 03 June 2011 13:23



Boxing skills are like wealthy people. Everyone has the ability to make one million dollars but relatively few people know what it takes to be wealthy. The beauty of boxing at its essence is its simplicity. You have to throw a punch to hit the other guy. Even the smartest dummies could figure that out. The ability it takes to dominate a fight without receiving a scratch on your face, well, that takes another level of understanding.

A fighter told me once, "People could watch the sport all they want but until they get in the ring, they will never truly understand the game. This game is about skills."

The definition of skills in boxing gets misinterpreted at times. Think back to 2005 when Floyd Mayweather Jr. fought Arturo Gatti.

Thomas Hauser wrote, "In boxing, the better fighter beats the more exciting fighter almost every

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time." He was illustrating his point in a post fight description of Floyd Mayweather's sixth round knockout over Arturo Gatti. The story focused on the comments made by both combatants during the buildup of the fight. Before the bout Mayweather said, "I'm not going to let some guy beat my brains out. The name of the game is to hit and not get hit. The less you get hit, the longer you last in this sport. I'm not in this sport to see how hard I can get hit or to see how many big punches I can take. That's what he does."

Arturo responded with, "Floyd talks a big game, but he's never fought anyone who hits as hard as me. When I punch my opponents, I hurt them. People fall down when I hit them, and he's going to walk into it. The only thing he has over me is speed. We'll see what happens when speed and power go against each other."

Well, power does not work in boxing if your target has enough ability to get out of the way. When looking at differing viewpoints closely, Mayweather was saying that he was going to win by out-boxing Arturo Gatti. And the result of the contest was one of the most lopsided PPV bouts in recent memory. But it was also one of the most overlooked fights of Mayweather's career because it looked too easy.

Describing a victory in boxing is complicated. Mayweather is 41-0 and has been justifiably wobbled by only two punches (thrown by Shane Mosley) since he fought DeMarcus Corley back in 2004. But he is considered soft to some viewers because he refuses to engage in a test of chins.

Today, Andre Ward is falling into the same Mayweather mold of misinterpretation. I addressed the issues of criticism with the super middleweight champion over the phone last week.

Much like Mayweather or Hopkins, Ward's fights are not always filled with the most action. He might not always win with mind numbing speed or blazing knockout punches. He wins because he has more boxing skills than his opponents. And the ones with the most boxing skills have the ability to make a fight look dull in victory when they refuse to stoop to the level of their competition by engaging in a back and forth tussle, by taking risks and allowing themselves to be hit just to prove that they have a solid chin.

Nobody earns success without criticism. Nowadays, the Oakland based champion seems to end up describing his level of competition, and his style as a pugilist, and his in-ring strategies, more so than luxuriate in his dominant victories, a dilemma that Mayweather has endured throughout his career.

Maybe the way an average fight fan views a fight compared to a world class boxer is completely different. It could be that most of us don't see what the fighters see because we have not stepped foot in the ring.

Ward has his own assessment. "I think it is a combination of things. It depends on how long the person has been a boxing fan. If you were a boxing fan that follows the fighters from the 60's, 70's, or 80's, I think that those guys tend to appreciate the sweet science a lot more. They are able to see what you need to see in the game of boxing as a whole. But if you just became a fan

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a few years ago, with the rise of the MMA, you might be looking for some sort of tough man competition. I respect MMA a great deal. I watch it and appreciate the sport, but boxing is much different.”

“You cannot argue with the result,” Andre Ward told me after he defeated Arthur Abraham on May 14th by lopsided unanimous decision. It was the Ward’s third straight dominating victory. Besides the fact that Ward has practically shutout his last three opponents, winning almost every round on all of the judges’ scorecards, many observers have criticized him for having unexciting fights. But analyze his level of competition. Look at who he has fought and who they have beaten before making a judgment. To make a boring fight against world class boxers is a difficult task.

Now, Andre Ward has a long ways to go in order to fight at the level of expertise of Floyd Mayweather, or Bernard Hopkins. But he is a schooled fighter. And when describing his technique in the ring, the champion echoes the thoughts of his current boxing heroes.

Ward said, “I don’t care who you are, if you take a lot of punishment in this sport, you are not going to last long. And I have heard those same words come out of Floyd Mayweather’s mouth. I have heard the same words come out of Bernard Hopkins’ mouth. Two guys who seem ageless, who are masters, not just fighters or boxers, they are masters of this sport that we call boxing. Those two guys have been criticized for having boring fights or not putting up action. But it looks like that sometimes when you shut a guy out. When it is not a back forth type of deal, sometimes it looks easy. But (in my fights) it might look easy sometimes or effortless, and the conclusion that people draw is that you are not giving it your all.”

Making it look easy might not be cool for some of the viewers but it is very fun for fighters who are trained to duck punches. Ward said, “You can’t force a guy to fight. I am going in there to please the fans and put on a spectacular performance every time out. But if the other guy is only in there to survive then there will be less action. It does not necessarily mean that it is a bad fight.”

Then Ward described the fighting styles of his recent last five opponents and why their styles dictated the results of the outcome. He said Edison Miranda and Mikkel Kessler came to fight and win, which led to more exchanges in the fights. However, he believes that Allan Green, Sakio Bika, and Arthur Abraham all stopped trying to win and were only in there to survive.

And he has a good point that seems to get overlooked sometimes. Surviving a fight is the natural instinct of every boxer. All of them are trained to endure punishment in the ring. It is a part of the game.

Sugar Shane Mosley was heavily criticized by practically everyone that follows boxing for his poor effort against Manny Pacquiao a few weeks ago. Say what you like about his performance, he knew how to survive. After the fight Mosley said, “I did not want to take any risks.” Crafty veterans who were once great fighters know how to do what it takes to go the distance. Boxers are taught first to protect themselves. Against Pacquiao, Mosley did the same thing that De la Hoya did, he did the same thing that Roy Jones did against Joe Calzaghe, he did enough to

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survive.

There is a difference between outclassing and outpunching your opponents. Fighters like Floyd Mayweather, Bernard Hopkins, and Andre Ward understand that. Why can't we?

[Comment on this article](#)

DeadRinger says:

Well, I disagree with the wealth metaphor, since many people are systematically screwed and cut from the bootstraps at birth. However, everything else here is spot-on. I don't understand why styles like those of Mayweather and Ward draw such ire from most boxing fans. Well, I'll correct myself: most boxing fans probably do appreciate the technical craftsmanship of guys like Ward. (Unfortunately, there are a lot of outspoken "fans" on the internet who don't know anything about the sport but will spew their garbage opinions anyway). Also, ever noticed how nobody ever blames the losing boxer for a boring fight? That's because the loser is so thoroughly dominated that the winner is presumed to have had complete autonomy over the action. People who moaned about Ward not stopping Abraham probably didn't realize that Abraham, for all his shortcomings, has one of the best chins in the sport. Why should Ward have played into Abraham's strengths in what would have been a futile effort? Since many fans don't care who wins a fight, as long as it's a bloody struggle, it doesn't matter to them.

Radam G says:

Wow! This piece is a paradox. That's all that I can say for now. Holla!

Real Talk says:

I agree with a lot of what the guy who wrote this article said, but I peeped the way he flat out twisted the Sakio Bika fight. Nice try buddy. Don't know what fight you were watching, Andre Ward was in survival mode in that fight and lost that one but got the gift decision. Anybody reading this watch the fight again and watch the look on his wife's face when they announced SOG won. She saw the same fight I saw. Real Talk. Dueces

MisterLee says:

No disrespect, but ward outfought and out fouled bika. he dominated the inside and hit him at will with power shots, and slipped and dodged and blocked most of what bika threw. Bika said afterward: "Ward is the greatest boxer I have ever fought." Anyway, I think Ward brings the fight to the opponent more than pple think, but he also has enough discipline to stick to a game plan and not veer from it to make some exchanges. Ward is the complete package, and simply needs a worthy rival to up his fanbase... without corrales, de la hoyo, and gatti, then mayweather would not be a household name. Ward needs a career defining fight, and i think he'll get it in dawson or bute or someone with skill and experience. same with timothy bradley,

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holler! pple quho critizcize his power are too blind to see he's not only keeping his opponents' honest, he's staggering them, and busting up their face, and making their ribs look red. he is not malignaggi or whitaker in terms of power, he does have power. Holler!

brownsugar says:

I like fighters who can avoid punches on purpose. They say the hardest thing to do in the sport of BaseBall is to hit a fastball. The hardest thing to do in boxing is not get hit. Everybody gets hit but watching fighters exhibit the hard to master craft of defense is beautiful to behold because it's something that takes exceptional skill to do. Especially since it's hard to predict the speed velocity and angle the punches are coming from. Ward was picking off the majority of Bika's wild and crazy punches all night and hurt both Bika and Abraham by walking them into stiff jabs. Ward will look even better in his next fight. I don't know if we'll ever see Mayweather again.

Radam G says:

I gotta go with MisterLee. On dat night in question, it was all SOG. Bika was swinging, as if he were trying to chop down a tree. But he could catch da Ward. Sika was easy, not hard. What else can I say. Real Talk just didn't see it our way. Holla!

MisterLee says:

Nice point, B-sug. Word up. Ward is the real deal, he might rule over everyone up to cruiserweight in the next 4 years IMO. Holler!

the Roast says:

Ward won that fight going away. Bika pressed him but he got out fought.

Real Talk says:

I respect all 3 of you guys opinions an I only watched the fight once so I'll watch it again. When I watched it the first time it looked like Ward was leary of Bika's arkwadness as well as his reach and power. He looked to be nuetralized to me. I'm reminded of F-Lo article when he mention the luxury we have of watching the fight a second time when we blast the judges. I'm going to use that priviledge and get back to you guys later. I got nothing against Ward, we all know I'm a fan of skills an I'm on the same page with B-Sug...it's a beautiful thing to slip and block punches. We call it sharpness around here in D.C. Boxing seems to be turning anti-Sweet Science lately and criticizing defense. Defense is beautiful when it's lead or followed by offense. Being defensive is not a bad thing, being OVERLY defensive for too much of the fight ala Mosley is not good for entertainment. Some fighters have a disadvantage in the power department and have to chip and chop their opponent down to size before they can really take it to them so they have to play the Matador. I love watching a master display of boxing skills followed by a KO ala Leonard vs. Hearns 1. Ray had to stay away from the Motor City Cobra on his bicycle and box or he was going night night. Hearns reach and power was taking everybody out. Ray boxed in spots but was being outboxed....but he kept on chipping and chopping the tall tree down with

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good bodywork until those hands came down just a little bit then POW!!! A perfect pin point hook on the chin hurt and froze Hearn's just enough for Ray to finish him. That was and still is one of my favorite KO's of all time. Sugar Ray Leonard was in phenomenal shape. He had speed, power, good defense slipping and using his feet as well as an exciting style. Think I'm going to watch that fight too. Till we meet again brethren. Dueces

bbooth says:

I've been watching boxing since I was a kid. There was nothing like sitting with my dad watching the likes of Duran, Hagler, Hearn's, Benitez, or the Sugar Man. I love watching any fighter, whether a brawler or boxer, and can appreciate them for who they are. I'm with everyone here, and it is hard to understand why the art is dying.

Mayweather and Ward are actually my two favorite fighters. What they do is a true art form, and Ward has more years to keep growing and improving.

It's a strange dynamic when compared to other sports. If a pitcher in baseball throws a no-hitter. The media jump all over it as an amazing event (it is). In football a game can be 0-0 and decided by a field goal in the last minute, and it was a defensive masterpiece. In basketball, all you hear is "Defense wins championships". So why the reversal for boxing? If Floyd fights and puts on a defensive clinic, those same people call it boring, a waste of PPV dollars, he never fights worthy opponents, etc.

I'm not sure I'll ever understand it, but in an increasing world of instant gratification, I think the 1st round KO or its boring mindset is here to stay.

mortcola says:

Real boxing fans DO appreciate their skills. Fans of violence who know enough about the sport to sound semi-informed, but who are really more cartoon, blood and guts freaks, aren't what I call boxing fans - boxing is just a setting in which something gruesome might happen to feed their lust. Ward and Mayweather are artist-scientists, no doubt. Even among people who appreciate the sport, but are more fed by the adrenaline of the violence than the drama of skills and hearts, react to the loose ends, the slip-ups, the moments of extreme domination, of fight-to-death insanity - they do not necessarily see the subtle mastery of those angles, that anticipation, the discipline of true ring generalship. That last thing, ring generalship, isn't entertaining unless you know what it is, and what it takes to achieve it, what real boxing people know about. Yeah, a blood and guts war IS an amazing thing to watch. But that is the spectacle, not the art. Some fighters give you both. They don't stay healthy, don't last long at the top. One truth about Money, if he weren't such a dick, he wouldn't sell many tickets - top-tier skills alone just don't bring in the money, just like Rihanna wouldn't be the mega-star she is for singing well; Ward may never be a big draw, but he is, flat out, a master of the sweet science, as is Mayweather, no matter how I bash him.

undisputed34 says:

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@ mort...One of the greatest examples of ring generalship i can remember off the top of my head is Bhop vs Trinidad. I think that was of the best examples of two top tier fighters facing each other while relatively fresh and one fighter controlling every aspect of the fight. It was beautiful. Though as of late ward has confessed to studying mayweathers poise in the ring, he continues to remind me of Hopkins the more i watch him

mortcola says:

[QUOTE=undisputed34;14003]@ mort...One of the greatest examples of ring generalship i can remember off the top of my head is Bhop vs Trinidad. I think that was of the best examples of two top tier fighters facing each other while relatively fresh and one fighter controlling every aspect of the fight. It was beautiful. Though as of late ward has confessed to studying mayweathers poise in the ring, he continues to remind me of Hopkins the more i watch him[/QUOTE]

Great example. I had more jaw-dropped moments in that fight just watching B-Hop's mastery-in close, but teflon, nothing of Trinidad's making an impact, and those short, dissecting counters. And complete cool.

Kid Blast says:

They do

Kid Blast says:

They do

Kid Blast says:

They do

Kid Blast says:

They do

tasdevil says:

Mayweather has outstanding physical skills , an incredible reach and a tame referee. So he can win fights, but as a person he is not to be admired , nor is his behaviour.

Andre ward is different, nothing against him in any way but he doesn't catch the public eye.