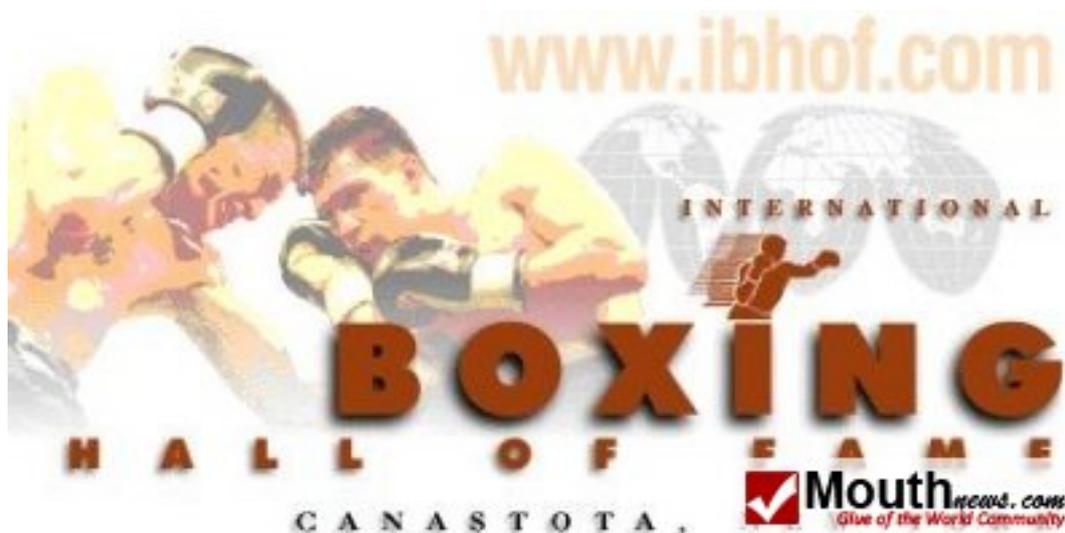


Written by Eric Raskin

Tuesday, 14 June 2011 15:22



Wanna know what I did last Friday? After finding out late Thursday night that an interview I'd been trying to get for two months could be had if I could be at the International Boxing Hall of Fame by 10 a.m. the next day, I got up at 4:15 after on four hours of sleep, left the house at 5, arrived in Canastota at 9:30, did my interview, milled about for roughly 45 minutes of induction weekend festivities, then got back in the car and drove another 4½ hours home.

(In about a month or so, I should be ready to reveal whom the interview was with and what it was for. Until then, you'll just have to find a way to cope with the all-consuming curiosity.)

Anyway, never let it be said that I lack commitment. And here is further proof of my commitment to the fight fans, as I begin the weekly Rants column by taking time out of my busy schedule to thoughtfully respond to one of your emails:

Eric,

Put yourself in the shoes of Mr. Hershman. You want to put together another tournament.

1. What format would you use? (i.e. 4 man, 6 man, or some other format)

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2. Which division would you target? Or if you want to be more specific, which fighters would you target?

Choppa B,

Sydney, Australia

Hi Choppa,

As I see it, your two questions are very much intertwined, as the format I would use depends on the division I'm focusing on and how many tournament-worthy fighters it contains. Independent of a specific division or specific fighters, I look at the first question this way: Four-fighter tournaments are obviously the quickest and easiest to organize and complete; I'm up for another "Super Six" style tournament because I believe the current one has been great for fight fans overall, but they're obviously a logistical nightmare for Ken Hershman and his staff; and I'd also be interested in an eight-fighter tournament, possibly with a double-elimination format.

No matter which format I choose, I have to decide whether or not I'm approaching the answer to your question with a heavy focus on what's realistic. If I am going with realism instead of a pure flight of fantasy, then my choices are limited by the fact that Top Rank probably won't let any of its fighters enter a tournament full of non-Top-Rank fighters, as well as by the fact that some fighters I'd like to include currently have ties—however unofficial they may be—to HBO.

Anyway, there are three divisions I'd look at. The first is middleweight, which has an indisputable champion, Sergio Martinez, but could use an indisputable number-one contender, which is where a tournament comes in. Granted, this is more up HBO's alley than Showtime's, because "Maravilla" currently fights on HBO. Still, a four-fighter tourney would be useful, with the winner guaranteed a title shot against Martinez. If we're being realistic, we have to accept that Paul Williams' people won't want him in the tournament (the erstwhile most avoided man in boxing has suddenly transformed into the most protected man in boxing), and same goes for Julio Cesar Chavez Jr. So here are the four fighters I'd include: the Felix Sturm-Matthew Macklin winner (they fight in two weeks), Daniel Geale, Dmitry Pirog, and Sebastian Zbik. They're all decent fighters, none are well known to American audiences, and this tournament would give us a contender who's earned a shot at Martinez and raised his profile along the way.

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The second division I'd explore is cruiserweight, which is similarly stocked with credible fighters who need exposure. There was talk of a "Super Six" at 200 pounds about a year ago, but it never got off the ground. Still, if you included the right fighters—The Ring's top six of Steve Cunningham, Marco Huck, Krzysztof Wlodarczyk, Denis Lebedev, Troy Ross, and Danny Green—this is a tournament that would serve a purpose and provide some entertaining fights along the way. Cruiserweight has never been a glamorous division, but then again, super middleweight wasn't a hot or particularly respected division before Showtime's tournament in that weight class began.

In the end, though, if I'm looking for a tournament to get truly pumped for, it has to be at featherweight. You want a dream Super Six? Gather together Yuriorkis Gamboa, Chris John, Orlando Salido, Juan Manuel Lopez, Daniel Ponce De Leon, and Mikey Garcia. Yes, some of those guys have been on HBO lately. Yes, some of them are Top Rank fighters. So ultimately, Ken Hershman has a better chance of convincing Carl Froch to pimp out his girlfriend to future opponents than he does of bringing these six featherweights together for a Super Six. But if you're asking me what tournament I'd like to see, with no concern for what Hershman can realistically pull off, that's it.

And now that your question has been answered, let's Rant, shall we?

- Amir Khan has been installed as a 5-1 betting favorite over Zab Judah?! I would have guessed he would be more like 2-1, maybe 3-1 tops. If ever there's been a time to put my money where my mouth is, it's when the guy my mouth has been talking about happens to pay out five bucks for every dollar I would bet.

- There were approximately 358 prospects in action on TV last weekend, and I'm going with Thomas Dulorme as my favorite among them for now. The always dangerous DeMarcus Corley brought his A-game (or least his B-plus-game), and Dulorme had his way with "Chop Chop" at almost every turn. I was particularly impressed with Dulorme's ability to make Corley miss and counter him. Dulorme appears to have old-school skills—which means he can look forward to Teddy Atlas someday diminishing his accomplishments by telling him all the rest of today's fighters stink.

- Speaking of Teddy, I considered writing up the reasons he and Joe Tessitore were wrong to

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question Kostya Tszyu's Hall of Fame credentials, but then I realized that by presenting an argument in favor of Tszyu, I would be effectively validating the other side of that discussion. In reality, this one is so obvious, there's no need to even explain why Tszyu belongs in the Hall. Why construct my side of the debate if there is no debate?

- For the most part, I thought Jeremy Schaap did a solid job playing the role of the Brian Kenny last Friday (where the eff has BK been, by the way?), except when he muttered something about "a belt is a belt is a belt." But I'll let it slide. Like I said, Schaap was pretty good overall. And he spoke like a normal human being, instead of using that weird, overly baritone, radio-DJ voice that most of the other BK subs insist on violating my aural cavities with.

- The Jeopardy answer: 284. And the question: What would Hasim Rahman weigh for a fight if he wasn't taking his latest comeback seriously at all?

- I was excited to learn that Dusty Harrison made his pro debut over the weekend. He always was my favorite of the Traveling Wilburys.

- I don't criticize ShoBox announcer Steve Farhood very often. That's partially because he's a friend and I admit that I might be a little less inclined to rip a friend in print. And it's partially because Steve simply doesn't make many stupid/illogical/annoying comments. But I must take issue with Farhood's claim that Chris Avalos did nothing wrong when he lost a point in the third round of his fight with Khabir Suleymanov on Friday night. Avalos scored a knockdown, Suleymanov bounced back up, and Avalos threw six more punches, including four while the ref was holding his other arm and trying to break the fighters up. If a guy follows through with one shot after the ref steps in, that's understandable. But four? Avalos was lucky none of them landed hard, because I think it would have been disqualification-worthy if he'd done damage with one of those shots.

- Good move by the editors of The Ring, advancing Carl Froch to number two in the super middleweight rankings following his win over Glen Johnson. Looks like we've got us a Ring title fight to conclude the Super Six—a pretty fair sign that this Super Six, however rocky the road, should go down as a successful venture.

- On the one hand, I'm thrilled for Juan Diaz that he made the choice to put law school ahead of

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a boxing career that really doesn't have much upside anymore. On the other hand, does the world really need one more lawyer?

- By the way, a quick but important thank you to Jeff Brophy at the International Boxing Hall of Fame for helping me secure the interview I mentioned at the top of the column. It wasn't exactly a slow weekend for those guys, but Jeff went out of his way to hook me up. Those Brophys are quality people.

- A new episode of Ring Theory (<http://ringtheory.podbean.com>) is going up this week, featuring analysis and debate on Mayweather-Ortiz, highly justified savagery of several of boxing's most prominent color commentators, and a preview of Wladimir Klitschko vs. David Haye on HBO. Speaking of Klitschko-Haye and HBO, I'm going to go out on a limb and say, of the two fighters, Haye is the bigger fan of Game Of Thrones. All that beheading just seems a little more up his alley.

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