

Written by Michael Woods

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Wolak-Rodriguez will be, we promise you, a shootout.

The Summer Solstice is upon us, and for me, that means we are headed toward the backstretch of ESPN's "Friday Night Fights."

Well, it also means ludicrous ConEd bills and a decent excuse to get Italian ice every day...But I digress.

TSS spoke to ESPN's director of boxing programming, Doug Loughrey, and he sized up the show to this point and gave us some tidbits on what the next couple months holds for FNF.

"I'm happy with the Friday Nigh Fights has gone this year so far," he told us. "On ESPN2, ESPN3, Deportes, all the platforms, boxing is doing well."

Ratings are up 11%, year over year, and Corona Extra entered the mix as a presenting sponsor, joining Just For Men, AT&T and Ford as advertisers. Also, Loughrey likes that they are up 13% in the men 18-34 demo. "We are the Kansas City Royals of boxing, spending-wise, we're frugal, but the sponsors have allowed us to spend a little more."

Viewers should be pretty pleased with one main event that Loughrey is pumped about, the July 15 Delvin Rodriguez-Pawel Wolak clash, which will unfold at NYC's Roseland Ballroom. "Delvin, who I like, has been going through a rough patch. Whether it was a bad decision, or he was maybe unprepared for a fight, regardless. He finds himself in against Wolak, and it's a real crossroads fight for Delvin. He has to win or his career is pretty much over." Loughrey said he was told by Team Wolak that they've sold about 900 tickets, so Rodriguez will have to get hustling to pack his crew from Danbury, CT into Roseland to outshout Wolak rooters.

Loughrey is also proud of FNF's entry into the 3D space. They'll do 3D shows on June 24, July

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1, July 8, July 22nd and August 5, he said.

Loughrey said he'd like to get banger Ruslan Provodnikov, a FNF staple, back on the air before the season closes, with the Aug. 19th show. He had to plug a hole on the July 29 card, which was to be headlined by Juan Diaz, who pulled out to pursue his law degree. Viewers shouldn't be too crushed--the alternative is a Edison Miranda-Yordanis Despaigne clash, which pits the 34-5 Colombian vet against the Cuban who is actually a year older, at 31, than Miranda. Referencing some of those "trickle down economics" from before, viewers would have been pleased to see Joel Casamayor on FNF, on July 29. He was to meet Jorge Teron, looking to get back on the prospect track after losing to Brandon Rios last year, but word is Casamayor was in a car accident, and may have broken ribs, which would sideline him.

Andre Dirrell is on Loughrey's wish list, as is, or was, Dmitriy Pirog, who has been pursuing Sergio Martinez, to no avail, and would be well served to get some face time in the States to build his visibility. But we got word Thursday that Pirog is taking an overseas fight instead, so he will remain something of a mystery guy for the near future.

As always, I urge fight fans to tune in to FNF, and not just because I do work for the same corporation. It behooves us to support the vendors, so they are encouraged to telecast more boxing.

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the Roast says:

Damn right EM. We the fans have to support FNF. The fights may not always be the best but the studio stuff with Brian Kenny is good. Just as I always tuned in to Tuesday Nights Fights on USA, we have to support the fight game. We all miss these shows when they are gone. Pirog could use some face time. Let him beat the crap out of Zbik and call out JCC Jr and Sergio. This is how these things get done.

brownsugar says:

FNF's has been "BANGIN" recently with some of the most competitive match-ups on tv ... with future stars like Ishmayl Syllahk being placed in the opposite corner of Highly regarded and Undefeated Cuban LightHeavyweight prospect Dispaigna (who Edison Miranda is scheduled to fight in August) 700 amatuer fights between them and no pro losses... (Syllahk won and put on a boxing clinic)...not a single current 175lb boxer, Bhop included can hope to beat this smooth boxer-puncher...sorry got off the subject.. There nothing I like better than watching FNF online... the high def resolution combined with the ultra-realistic audio..is amazing.. (I swear ESPN must be putting mic's in the fighters gloves) the ringside atmosphere is so palpable I almost feel like I'm there... the sound of the boxers punching the plywood with their feet as they thrust their entire body-weight behind a punch... the crisp "Snap" "Snap" "Snap" of a perfectly executed triple-jab combined with the grunts, gasps of pain, and crazy onliners from the ringside seats is

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the next best thing as being there....Watching Delvin Rodriguez in Wisconsin was wild... the locals came dressed in rolled up checkered flannel shirts with bib overalls... I could have sworn I saw somebody riding a mechanized bull in the background,.. while in another corner I saw a bon-fire and some Line-dancing going on... nobody can say those Corn-Huskers don't know how to throw a fight party... at an event in Philly, the local fans were tossing barbs like Richard Pryor and a comedy roast... "no more free haircuts for you Junior if you lose this'n" Yes the changing venues... the effervescent announcing... and even the story telling Teddy Atlas helps it all come together... and for an added bonus it's always a entertaining to see who the special guest boxer is...ESPN continues to get stronger and stronger... Since Arum , Haymon, and Del La Hoya own most of the HBO slots(with all their protected fighters..participating is too many mismatches)...ESPN is the place for unexposed boxers to make some noise and gain some recognition.I wanna see Pirog next! or Golovkin... or maybe both of them in the ring fighting each other... ESPN "The Home Of Upsets"... protected boxers beware..

the Roast says:

Very well said B-Sug. I will have to check out the online version of FNF.

Radam G says:

WHADDUP, The Roast? When are you gettin' jiggy with that interview of B-Sug? Man, ya came all up in my grill, but ya haven't come at B-Sug STILL! Wow! It is time to climb up that hill. TSSU is waitin' to get dat ole funky fill. Holla!

the Roast says:

@Radam, we have had a few production problems. B-Sug is demanding more money. I have demanded a prostitute while I wait for the details to be hashed out. This is how it goes in the world of big time interviews. It will get done at some point. My art cant be rushed. Would you rush Picasso? Would you rush Beethoven? Kobayashi?

Radam G says:

Hehehehehehehehehe! The Roast is such a darn comic. Man, you are so lucky that making people laugh until their sides almost crack open and they have leakage is not malpractice of a comedian, or I'd have you in COURT! I be gettin' da BIG-PAY off like I did against Don King back in da day. WOW! You are no doubt a cyberspace Don King of da comedy spittin until someone is almost s___! OMG! Holla!