It was a busy, entertaining, but ultimately unfulfilling weekend in the world of punch swapping, and I'll cover it all in this week's Rants. But first, a quick dip into the mailbag for a final word (for now) on Wladimir Klitschko:

Hi Eric,

Do you think that Wlad suffers from the same fate as Gene Tunney did, viewed as an enigma and not what the heavyweight champion should be, a smart champion who reads books about history and poetry and was interested in the arts and in cultivating his intellect as much as prize fighting?

I wonder if when Wlad starts to fade we will see a different fighter similar to what we have seen with Juan Manuel Marquez in the last few years. He might be a physical challenge, but I think that the biggest challenge for fighters against Wlad is trying to overcome his amazing mental strength and discipline inside and outside the ring.

By the way, really liked the Grantland piece.
Cheers,
Nicholas

Nicholas,

I honestly don't think any of the Wlad "haters" hold his intelligence or personality against him at all. If anything, those things make it hard to be a 100-percent hater. I know I respect the hell out

of him as a person. He's about the same age as me, and watching his hilarious YouTube video where he silently reacted to a series of photos after the David Haye fight, I felt strongly that he's the sort of guy I'd probably be friends with if our paths crossed outside the professional setting. Certainly, I'd expect to get on better with him than I would with someone like Haye. But no matter how much I respect him on a personal level and even admire the resolve he's shown bouncing back from two knockout defeats that seemed poised to end his career, it doesn't change the fact that his fights bore me to pieces. That's why he "suffers" whatever fate of public opinion he suffers; not because he doesn't act enough like an uneducated thug.

As for whether he'll become more exciting, a la Marquez, when his age starts to show, I tend to doubt it. The Haye fight was an uncommonly high-profile heavyweight event; I thought that if ever Klitschko was going to put a premium on entertainment, this was the time. And he didn't. So I'm now convinced he's content to keep doing whatever gives him the best chance to win for as long as he's around. I think he'll continue to fight in a safety-first manner for as long as it's working, and if a time comes when it stops working and he gets blasted out again, I doubt we'll see another reinvention and comeback. Klitschko has so much money in the bank at this point that his next loss could easily be his final fight.

Okay, on to the Rants, starting with a smooth transition from the mailbag topic to the topic du jour:

• When I watch Paul Williams fight, I see the test case in what would have become of Wladimir Klitschko's career if he hadn't used his height to box cautiously. If Wlad fought with the same aggression as Williams, he wouldn't be the heavyweight champ at age 35. He probably wouldn't be boxing anymore, period.

• Let's all pinkie shake on this right now: We will ignore what the judges said and view Saturday night's HBO main event as "Erislandy Lara W 12 Paul Williams." Lara won, he's in the mix now to fight any star around 154 pounds. Williams lost, he should be considering retirement a lot more seriously than a third fight with Sergio Martinez.

• This was probably the worst decision boxing has seen in a few years (Joel Casamayor over Jose Armando Santa Cruz is the last one I can think of that was more mind-boggling), and of course, anyone who scored for Williams (or even thought it was close) will tell you he "outworked" Lara. Screw that. I've had it with judges who think punches that miss have positive value. Scoring for the guy who throws more is like saying whichever basketball team gets off more shots deserves to win, regardless of whether the balls went through the little orange circle.

• I'm not buying into the "Williams is a different fighter than he was a couple of years ago" bit. Okay, maybe he's slipped a little. But basically, the guy Lara beat the crap out of was the same guy who ate left hands from Carlos Quintana all night in February 2008. Against the right opponents, Williams looks great, but against certain guys—particularly clever and quick southpaws—he's disturbingly easy to hit.

• Not only does Lara deserve a win on his record, but his cutman deserves some serious

recognition for the job he did with that Enswell. If that guy had been in Floyd Mayweather's entourage for the last 15 years, he probably could have kept Floyd's ego from rising above normal levels.

• Credit to Harold Lederman for getting off his best line in recent memory, with "We ain't getting no 3,000 hits in this fight." Larry Merchant, the network's resident joke-cracking cynic, had to have been proud of Harold when he heard that one.

• And as Rico Ramos showed, you don't need 3,000 hits in boxing. You can sometimes get it done with 2,999 fewer than that.

• Over on Showtime, we got the one outcome in the Brandon Rios-Urbano Antillon fight that could prevent it from being a classic—Rios rolling to a quick win—but I don't think anyone's complaining. I tweeted that the opening round offered hints of Hagler-Hearns, and it was interesting that this bout ended violently in the third as well. Obviously, this was no Hagler-Hearns in the final analysis. Not even close. But Rios did continue his march toward becoming one of the biggest stars in boxing, a position I expect him to hold for the next five years or so.

• You know what I love about Rios? He doesn't stop and complain to the ref when he gets hit low. He just keeps going. He has no interest in buying time for his opponent.

• Excellent call by Al Bernstein, saying he'd like to see Carlos Molina vs. Pawel Wolak. If Wolak beats Delvin Rodriguez this weekend, that's a fight that should absolutely be made.

• My new favorite boxing name: Creed Fountain, the cutman for Kermit Cintron. (However, if hearing that name starts getting songs by the band Creed stuck in my head, then it will quickly become my least favorite name in boxing.)

• Here's another fun name for you: Janks Trotter. I can't tell yet if Trotter is actually going anywhere, but he's a young fighter I definitely want to see more of.

• On the other side of the spectrum: That'll do, Emmanuel Lucero. That'll do.

• Did everyone catch ring announcer Ralph Velez breaking all sorts of rules of impartiality by calling Jesus Gonzales a "future champion" as he introduced him? As long as we're predicting the future, I hereby declare Velez a future caller of Bingo numbers at nursing homes in the greater Phoenix region.

• So, Ricky Hatton retired. In other news, Generalissimo Francisco Franco is still dead.

• Is Hatton a Hall of Famer? I'm about as on the fence as I can be. Give me three more years to see how his legacy has aged; there's no need for any Hall voters to make up their minds right now.

• Huge congratulations to Showtime on celebrating the 10th anniversary of ShoBox. Without a

doubt, my favorite ShoBox moment is the incredible 22-second fight between Sechew Powell and Cornelius Bundrage, in which a total of three punches landed and they (unofficially) produced five knockdowns. I'm really looking forward to seeing the video packages the show uses to celebrate its anniversary this Friday night.

• And speaking of things I'm looking forward to, Breaking Bad returns this Sunday! I jumped on this bandwagon a little late, plowing through the first three seasons when AMC replayed them several months ago, but I'm along for the ride now. Along with Mad Men, this is one of the two best shows on television. I hereby declare this it is your duty as a reader of my column to get the first three seasons on DVD, lock yourself in your house this weekend, and plow through it all in time for the season premiere.

• Thanks again to the aforementioned Al Bernstein for appearing on last week's episode of Ring Theory (http://ringtheory.podbean.com). If you don't know what Al has in common with David Haye, well, skip to the 29-minute mark and prepare to be amazed.

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