

Written by Eric Raskin
Tuesday, 19 July 2011 07:36



It takes a lot of choot-spa—err, chutzpah—to go on national TV and try to pronounce a word you’ve obviously never heard spoken. You know what else takes a lot of chutzpah? Assigning three inexperienced judges to the same major, HBO-televized fight, then suspending those judges when they screw up. New Jersey commission head Aaron Davis has pointed three fingers at those judges, but you know what happens when you point fingers, right? It makes an ass out of you and me. Or something like that.

Anyway, thanks to this past week’s developments, the Erislandy Lara-Paul Williams fight (no, I will not refer to it as the Paul Williams-Erislandy Lara fight) remains a hot topic, so this week’s miniature mailbag features a letter on that fight, sent with the subject line “The Casual Fan”:

Eric:

I would consider myself the exact definition of a casual boxing fan. I really enjoy the sport, get

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excited over big fights (and sometimes go out of my way to watch the big fights), and will typically opt to watch any seemingly decent fight on HBO, Showtime, or ESPN if I am sitting on the couch and something good comes on. I will be the first to admit that I don't often seek out the sport, but I enjoy it most of the time.

The last two of my "carve out time from my schedule to watch" fights were the Wlad Klitschko fight (great job previewing it on Grantland, by the way) and this past week's Paul Williams fight. Unfortunately, these two fights turned out to be the exact reason that the casual fan has become so turned off by the sport: a major heavyweight bout that couldn't have been more boring, with a champion that won't ever be able to really unify all of the ridiculous belts; and a great middleweight effort by an up-and-coming star that was defeated by the one thing that the casual fans associate with boxing more than any other sport—ludicrous judging and a result that makes no sense.

I appreciate all of your efforts to bring us a great take on the sport ... even if the sport works hard to defeat itself.

—Mike T.

Mike,

Typically, I'd say no sport works harder to defeat itself than boxing, but the folks running the NFL and the NBA haven't exactly been beacons of light lately. Still, there's no question that the two problems you cite are chronic ailments that have been driving fans away from boxing for decades. There's not a whole lot anyone can do about the Klitschko-Haye problem, except to not let David Haye challenge another Klitschko without doing something to really earn it, because at this point, there's no reason to think Haye will go all out for the win the next time. In general, though, boring fights happen sometimes, just like Super Bowls are blowouts sometimes and teams shoot 18.8 percent from the floor in NCAA Championship games sometimes. Being a boxing fan is partially about putting up with the boring matches with the knowledge that a thrilling one—like Brandon Rios vs. Urbano Antillon or Delvin Rodriguez vs. Pawel "E.T." Wolak—lies around the corner.

Awful judging, on the other hand, is something that it seems boxing's power brokers should be able to curb. The question is whether they want to. People can say all they want that there's no evidence of anything beyond incompetence at play in the Lara-Williams fight, but the two 10-10 12th-round scores look a little fishy, and this marked the third fight in three weekends where the only way to score for the guy who officially won is to come in with a mindset of "I'm giving anything remotely close to the prefight favorite." (And even after you do that, finding a way to score for Williams over Lara, Devon Alexander over Lucas Matthysse, and Felix Sturm over Matthew Macklin still isn't easy.) The bottom line is that, for either casual fans or hardcore fans, when you witness one man asserting his dominance over the other and are then told that the guy who won didn't actually win, it's maddening. It makes hardcore fans think about becoming casual fans, and it makes casual fans think about watching women's soccer. (Okay, maybe that's a stretch.)

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I've said before that I believe in a "one strike and you're demoted, two strikes and you're out" policy for judges. If a judge hands in a score that is viewed by nearly everyone as impossible to arrive at, that judge doesn't get major fights anymore and has to prove himself or herself on the clubfight circuit. (For example, Larry O'Connell's draw card in the first Lewis-Holyfield fight was unpopular but not unfathomable; Eugenia Williams' card was unfathomable. She gets demoted. So would the three Lara-Williams judges, the judge who had Alexander beating Matthisse by three (Carlos Colon), Pierre Benoist in the first Williams-Martinez fight, etc.) And if a judge who's been demoted works his or her way back to the big leagues and it happens a second time, that's it, lifetime ban. It's not a perfect system, in that (a) there's subjectivity involved in dishing out the demotions and bans, and (b) it might leave commissions with a shortage of available judges. But I believe getting rid of bad judges, simple as it sounds, is the first step to greatly decreasing the number of bad decisions we see. And just making judges fully aware that there are consequences when they screw up might prevent them from deciding in advance which fighter gets all the close rounds.

Anyway, try to hang in there, Mike. Your reward for putting up with Klitschko-Haye and Lara-Williams is sure to come soon.

Now, on to the Rants, starting with a fight that was indeed a reward for everyone who watched it:

- I hate stating the obvious (some sports writers build careers around it; I try to do it as infrequently as possible), but Delvin Rodriguez and Pawel Wolak are everything that's great about boxing. HBO should be crunching budget numbers right now to figure out how to make Rodriguez-Wolak II a Boxing After Dark opener.
- As I wrote on Twitter, you know it's a good fight when a broadcaster can say, "He took a left hook, on the hematoma, and shakes it off." Well said, Joe Tessitore. Also, credit to the much maligned Teddy Atlas for the simple but perfect line when the officials allowed the fight to continue despite Wolak's grotesque swelling, "They know that this is not opera."
- On the other side of the television-commentary spectrum we have Colonel Bob Sheridan. If we can suspend judges, we should suspend broadcasters as well, and I think the Colonel needs at least a six-month ban for calling Likar Ramos "a real good former champion." Ramos is neither real good nor a former champion. He's a former WBA interim beltholder. At a certain point, even a guy like Sheridan, who's forever aspiring to pad his stats for how many title bouts he's worked, has to draw a line, right?
- You know what? A six-month suspension for Sheridan isn't enough. Let's crank it up to "permanent ban" on account of his second strike coming a few minutes later, when he watched nine replays of the Juan Manuel Marquez-Ramos knockout, had 10 minutes of air time to fill with postfight blather, and didn't say one word about the curious way Ramos stumbled down, got comfortable on the canvas, and suddenly was unconscious. Marquez's right hand was a very good punch, hard and clean enough to produce a legit knockdown. But everything beyond that looked like a blatant acting job by Ramos. At the very least, it was suspicious enough that

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any responsible, competent broadcaster has to question what he's seeing.

- In the early days of my boxing writing career, I used to be able to keep straight all the prospects I saw. Now, they tend to blur together for me until one does something to really distinguish himself. After two rounds on Friday night, Raymond "Tito" Serrano seemed to be distinguishing himself. By the end of eight rounds, he had guaranteed I'd be unable to remember anything about him by the next time he's scheduled to fight.
- A final thought on Lara-Williams: Why is anyone pushing for a rematch? Lara won the fight. We all know it. What would it prove for him to do it again? This isn't Lewis-Holyfield, where there's an undisputed championship to be decided.
- A worthwhile clarification: Ring announcer Ralph Velez tweeted me in response to my criticism last week, stating that he mis-spoke when he called Jesus Gonzales a "future" holder of a particular regional belt. Gonzales actually already holds that regional belt, and Velez didn't mean to include the word "future."
- Don't think of it as Floyd Mayweather burning up 100 bucks. Think of it as Mayweather burning up 50 bucks in the event that he someday marries and then divorces Jin Mosley.
- As a fan of symmetry, I love the announcement of Mauricio Herrera-Ruslan Provodnikov II to end the Friday Night Fights season. It was a great start, and should be an outstanding finish, to one of FNF's finest years.
- I picked Zab Judah to score the upset knockout over Amir Khan when the fight was first signed, and I guess there's no sense backing down now. So here's my official prediction: Judah KO 9 Khan. I just have this feeling that the interlocking of Judah's strengths and Khan's weaknesses are going to leave the British beltholder really pissed at Tim Bradley for refusing to fight him.
- Keep an eye out this week for not one, but two new episodes of Ring Theory (<http://ringtheory.podbean.com>). We'll be recording a standard subscribers-only episode (probably running Wednesday), and we'll also be putting together a "Best Of Ring Theory" (probably running Thursday) that will be free to all listeners. Check it out and discover for yourself why there has never been an award for excellence in boxing podcasting that went to any show other than Ring Theory.

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