

## Showtime Sports Head Stephen Espinoza "On Cloud Nine"

Written by Michael Woods

Tuesday, 19 February 2013 15:08

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Stephen Espinoza has been talking with Floyd Mayweather's advisor Al Haymon for months, trying to get "Money" to jump ship from his longtime home, HBO, to Showtime. The head of Showtime Sports told TSS that in the last 24 hours, he got the news, via a phone call from Haymon, that he got what he wanted: the sport's main man in the fold.

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"I'm on cloud nine, we're thrilled with the opportunity," Espinoza told me. "Now we have to roll up our sleeves and get to work."

Espinoza said that Haymon met with Floyd, told him the details of the package, which calls for the soon to be 36 year old to fight up to six times within a span of 30 months for Showtime, and Floyd gave the thumbs up.

Espinoza said that the upside, besides Floyd getting fatter checks, would be for fight fans. He said he expects the boxer, who typically fights once or twice a year, to fight more often. "He has expressed that he wants to be fighting more frequently," Espinoza said.

I asked the Showtime boss if Floyd has an exit clause, which would allow him to bolt if he didn't care for how the promotion for the first Showtime bout, against Robert Guerrero in Las Vegas on May 4, unfolds. Espinoza said he preferred to let the release which went out speak for itself. "The deal is a great thing for the sport, Floyd's the icon of the sport right now," he said. "And if he's comfortable it's a great thing for the fans."

Will fans end up paying some of the freight, I wondered? No, Espinoza said, he foresees that pay-per-view prices "will be in line with prior Mayweather fights."

And if Mayweather gets past Guerrero, will we see him fight the winner of the top undercard bout on the May 4 card, Canelo Alvarez-Austin Trout? "That's not confirmed on the card yet," Espinoza stated. "And as we've learned in the Canelo business, you can't really predict who he will fight in the future. We're in discussions and we should know shortly."

Espinoza told me he sees Guerrero as "at least as difficult a foe" as the last man Mayweather fought, Miguel Cotto, and "an extremely difficult fight." Guerrero has shot down doubts and doubters when he went to 147, when he signed to fight Andre Berto, he said, and Espinoza sees his trajectory as a fighter on the rise.

I admitted I'd love love love to see Floyd fight on CBS proper, and asked Espinoza if we could see that. "I wouldn't say it's out of the question," he said. "If anyone could draw to free TV, it's

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Floyd. He's always had a unique business model and he's shown himself to be open to non-traditional arrangements. He often takes the path you don't expect him to take."

And did he expect Floyd to take the Showtime deal? "It was a tough thing to predict. He's had a long relationship with the other network."

Espinoza said that Showtime's total package, including the various platforms that are available for Floyd to perform on, gave them an advantage over HBO. Showtime, available to 22 million subscribers, is a subsidiary of the CBS Corporation, while HBO, available to 30 million subscribers, is part of Time Warner. Time Warner doesn't own an over-the-air network, as opposed to CBS, which boasts over 110,000,100 viewable households.

And could we see Mayweather content, other than the fight, on CBS? "There will definitely be CBS programming elements," Espinoza said. "We're in the process of finalizing those elements and we can circle back on this, in maybe a week."

In my dealings with Espinoza, I've found him to be low key, and genial, and not one to gloat or showboat, but I gave him the opportunity to chest thump some. Is Showtime No. 1 now, and is HBO No. 2? With a immense political deftness and decency, he said, "I like where our boxing and sports programming is as a whole. In the last couple yearts, we've made incredible strides in scripted shows, and in the last 14 months, we've also made huge strides keeping pace with our sports. The roster of talent, Jim Rome, 60 Minutes Sports... As a boxing fan, I'm very excited to see Floyd back. He's as entertaining, as compelling a person there is in sports. In the ring he's the most skilled boxer of this era. As a fan of the sport this is great news. He's coming back and intends to be more active in the near future."

Against who? Espinoza said the talent pool at 140-154 is rich, and that you can basically put the names, such as Devon Alexander, Kell Brook, Amir Khan, Victor Ortiz, in a hat and have Floyd pick them out, one by one. "That's the exciting thing, there's no shortage of opponents," he said.

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#### **deepwater says:**

umm..... lets see how this deal plays out. 6 times in 30 months? no way. maybe 3 fights in 30 months. i dont see floyds little hands fighting 6 more times without breaking. alexander brings no money and no story. victor ortiz on to bigger and better things just not in boxing. kell brook= years away from being a big name. broner at 140? never happen. it will ruin the bromance. khan vs mayweather can be huge if khan avenges his loss. I have not seen the numbers but I dont see floyd fighting 6 times in 50 months. I see floyd aging and having some more hand problems. espinoza is drunk and high now but lets wait in two more years and this investment might not be golden. the next pope will be petrus romanus so hold on tight its about to get more crazy. floyd vs pac to close the show???

#### **SouthPaul says:**

Espinoza isn't high or drunk...he's a lawyer by trade ...paid to bullshit, manipulate, and sell you hot air for your ballon ride. Some real suspicious business going on between him and Golden Boy Promotions.