

Jim Lampley Talks Froch-Kessler II, The New Landscape, "The Fight Game," More

Written by Michael Woods
Tuesday, 21 May 2013 15:01



Jim Lampley is like all of us, in that he is a boxing fan. It so happens that he operates on something of a higher mental plane than most of us, I dare say, and it's because of his ability to reason at a lofty zone that I enjoy picking his brain every now and again, getting an extra dose of his analysis apart from his time on HBO's fights and his periodic "The Fight Game" half hour magazine show.

I chatted with Lampley on Monday for a spell, getting his take on HBO's forthcoming slate, and the state of the game as a whole, especially pertaining to the bifurcated landscape which was fashioned when HBO decided eight weeks ago to spurn content provided by promoter Golden Boy.

First off, Lampley seemed jazzed about HBO's Saturday super middleweight scrap, which pits Carl Froch, the cocky Brit who has enjoyed a remarkable late-career uptick in popularity and regard from fans who appreciate his take-on-all-comers attitude and offensive-minded in-ring style, in a rematch against the 34-year-old Dane Mikkel Kessler who enters with more to prove,

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having battled the injury bug in recent years. The show, to unfold at the O2 Arena, kicks off at 6 PM ET.

"It's a great fight," Lampley told me. "The first fight (which took place on April 24, 2010, and saw Kessler win a UD12) was a high intensity battle fought at a very entertaining pace, and if anything both are now more offensive minded than before. I think we'll see even better action in this fight. They've both moved on a bit...Froch has improved as an attacking offensive fighter and Kessler has suffered injuries, is in his middle 30s, so at this stage they're both a little more effective at finding targets than in defending. I'm not saying it'll be the Thrilla in Manilla, they're not that far along but as Pacquiao and Marquez produced fireworks, because both have reached points where certain styles are dictated, the same thing is true here."

Froch is actually 35, and turns 36 in July, whereas Kessler just turned 34 in March, but I tend to think of Kessler as the elder in this one, because he has battled highly-publicized injuries. He had to exit the "Super Six" super middle tourney because of an injured left eye, you'll recall. He said the eye bothered him getting ready for Andre Ward in November 2009 (he lost that fight via TD11), and even more in his next fight, against Froch, in Denmark. He had to pull out of his next scheduled bout, against Allan Green, and let it heal.

Kessler returned to the ring and beat Mehdi Bouadla (TKO6) in June 2011. He hurt his right hand in training and a Nov. 2011 match with Robert Stieglitz was cancelled. Kessler next beat Green in May 2012. In his last outing, he stopped Brian Magee (TKO3), last December. It appears he enters this fight, to take place in London, injury-free.

"This year has produced tremendous fights for followers of the cult," Lampley continued. "And we have this to look forward to as well."

The play by play man, who joined HBO in 1988, said he's found lots of folks are liking Froch to win this rematch, a slight surprise since typically people lean toward the guy who won the first encounter.

As for the stakes, he noted that the division is held in a lockdown, of sorts, by Andre Ward. "The nature of Ward's fights with both Froch and Kessler means there's not a demand to see a rematch with either, so if the Saturday fight is great, there is a greater likelihood that we see

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them fight for a third time," he said. That could change, he supposed, if Ward expressed a desire to travel to London or Denmark to meet Froch or Kessler again.

I asked Lampley to put on his matchmaker hat, and choose a course for Ward, while on the subject of the man who will be in the booth with him and Max Kellerman in London. "That's a hard question," he said. "He says he'll be at 168 for now, not 175, and unless a new force arrives at 168, we have emerging prospects at 175, in Adonis Stevenson and Sergey Kovalev. We'd like to maybe see Ward against either of them. But at 168, there is the same opponent pool as before, and I can't see what unlocks that puzzle." Me neither, unless this Stanyslav Kastantov is a real comer, a hidden gem.

I figured I'd ask Lampley for some of that big-picture wisdom he dispenses on "Fight Game."

How do you reckon, I wondered, how it has gone so far with HBO turning their noses up at Golden Boy and Al Haymon content, and Showtime doing their thing with Floyd Mayweather pulling their train? Have the fans suffered for it?

"As an advocate for the sport I look forward to the day the pay premium networks do business with all promoters, and put aside the war that's ongoing," he said. "I think my network, HBO, made a very intelligent decision in deciding not to do business with a promoter who was priming business for the other premium cable channel. I don't disagree with the management decision to not do business with one promoter. In this polarized world, a small edge goes to Showtime on a week by week basis," he graciously stated.

Lampley thinks it is entirely possible that HBO and fans get graced with another rumble which will build on the fights the net furnished earlier, Rios-Alvarado, and Bradley-Provodnikov. "There's room in the marketplace," Lampley said, "and I'm happy with what we've had but I can't dismiss and will pay credit to what's going on across the street. Watching Lucas Matthysse was fun. I'm a fight fan, too. The fans have been getting their moneys worth, and for the time-being, can't complain too much about the arrangement. But I do long for the day and anticipate both networks doing business with all promoters. I think that day will come back."

Still looking down the road, Lampley said he will put together a "Fight Game" June 29, following the Golovkin-Macklin card. "That fight should be phenomenally entertaining, it's going to be a

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war," he said.

Does he know what will be on the next "Fight Game?" "The nature of the live shows in that format means the show tends to come together five or six days before," he said. "But we know it'll be a good one."

Lampley said he is also looking forward to seeing if Adonis Stevenson can emerge, and demand our attention; he fights Chad Dawson June 8 in Montreal, and on HBO. I told him I'd be happy, from a good-for-the-sport perspective, to see Stevenson perform emphatically at the Bell Centre. He agreed. "That would be good for the sport in the sense that you know Dawson, what he can do, there's not a lot of discovery left. Emanuel Steward used to talk about Adonis and say very, very complimentary things. I think we have a chance in a year, year and a half to have a spectacular showdown between Stevenson and Kovalev, the most entertaining fight in that class we've had in some time."

And wouldn't it be great, as another homage to Steward, who trained and managed Stevenson, to have the guy excel, and be another flourish on the Steward ledger? "I agree," Lampley said. "We had one wonderful moment with an Emanuel protege, when Jonathan Banks beat Seth Mitchell. The ether with Emanuel hasn't dissipated yet, and there could be more to come.

"Then we have Mikey Garcia, I'm looking forward to see him continue his career against a most entertaining boxer, Juan Manuel Lopez, that's not a paint job, it'll be an all out war. That's not a defensive tussle, that's a fan-friendly, offensive show. Then the Golovkin fight....We have an amazing month coming."

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deepwater says:

Froch will close out this fight like the champion that he is

amayseng says:

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[QUOTE=deepwater;31029]Froch will close out this fight like the champion that he is[/QUOTE]

As he should.

Kessler hasn't been good for a few years due to injuries and inactivity.

Having said that, it doesn't diminish froch who has improved the last few years.

the Roast says:

Yeah I'm thinking Froch by TKO in the 10th, probably a bad eye cut. Kessler retires, Rachel jumps up and down. Rewind, watch again, rewind, watch again, rewind, watch again...

amayseng says:

Add a mute button in there Roast.

Haha.

Bernie Campbell says:

First of all Jim, Where are those Waldo glasses you've been wearing on the broadcasts? Whadya think you look dashing in them or something! Furthermore Why doesn't anyone ban that idiot Sam Watson from the ring before the fights!