

Ethnic Pride Keeps Smaller Shows Like Golovkin-Macklin Alive

Written by Ronan Keenan
Monday, 01 July 2013 09:26



MASHANTUCKET, Conn. – Ireland's Matthew Macklin didn't attend the press conference at the Foxwoods Casino following his fight with Gennady Golovkin. Media interaction wasn't a priority for someone who had just been pummelled by one of boxing's hardest punchers.

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A few miles away, Danny O'Connor was in hospital receiving stitches to a damaged eye following his bout on the same card. But despite his facial appearance, O'Connor was victorious, outpointing Hector Munoz and helping bring some joy to the Irish-American bandwagon that drove the several thousand ticket sales for the event.

A promoter's goal is to find fighters that can resonate with a community. That's because boxing is among the few sports still driven by ethnic tribalism. Save for a couple of major fights each year, the US mainstream media generally ignores boxing, thus diminishing its exposure to the average sports fan. It's left to those fuelled by factors of race and nationality to keep smaller shows alive.

HBO and much of the boxing media heralded Kazakhstan native Golovkin as a future star before Saturday's bout, and while he may yet realize that status, it was Macklin and O'Connor that most of the crowd traveled to see. A fighter without an established fanbase must accomplish exceptional feats to attract a crowd. Not so for Irish fighters; their fervent support means that even unremarkable achievements can result in high-profile exposure. The Irish contingents don't follow a fighter because they think he will be the next star. Their pursuit is based on ethnic pride.

Nobody went to Connecticut on Saturday thinking the 31-year-old Macklin (*pictured above, euphoric after his previous win, in Hogan photo*) was headed for greatness. Macklin, born in England to Irish parents, had 29 wins but was knocked out by the premier middleweight Sergio Martinez last year, was outpointed by another middleweight titlist Felix Sturm in 2011 and had two previous losses on his record. The oddsmakers made the unbeaten Golovkin a 1/8 favorite to win. Regardless, Irish fans still came to see him try to take Golovkin's WBA piece of the middleweight crown.

Yet the pro-Macklin chants of "Ole, Ole" quickly dissipated as the bell sounded and the out-numbered Kazakhs suddenly made their presence felt. Macklin was on the back foot from the start, unable to mount much offense. Avoiding thudding blows from Golovkin became the top priority. His face severely reddened after only two minutes, Macklin looked like he had completed an average fight. But Golovkin isn't an average fighter. Every time Macklin attempted an attack, he was caught by head-snapping punches. The pattern continued until one minute into the third round when Golovkin forced Macklin onto the ropes and delivered a sickening left hook to the stomach. The challenger went down and remained there for several minutes, gasping for air.

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“He never let me get started,” said Macklin after regaining his composure. “He has clubbing, solid power and you can feel the weight of every punch he throws. I tip my hat to him.”

“We knew Macklin would be brave, but we knew that once he stood and fought with us, it would be over,” said Golovkin’s trainer Abel Sanchez. Golovkin now has a record of 27-0 with 24 knockouts.

The Irish-American fans were in better voice earlier in the night. Even though welterweight Danny O’Connor was fighting a man who entered the ring with a 21-10 record and a first round knockout defeat in his most recent bout, it was immaterial to the busloads of supporters from Massachusetts who wore green “Clan O’Connor” shirts. O’Connor, a proud Irish-American from the Boston suburbs, may have just one loss on his record but after another points victory on Saturday he has now scored only seven knockouts in 21 wins, a worrying stat given that concussive power is a typical requirement for a world-class prizefighter. O’Connor has rarely been in an easy bout. Although not powerful, he often adopts a straightforward, aggressive style that results in crowd-pleasing fights. So was the case on Saturday en route to a 79-73 points decision verdict from all three judges.

“I let it become a fight,” said O’Connor, 28, afterward. “He was a tough dude, but that was partially my fault. At the end of the day, I just like to fight. I guess I’m more old-school than some guys. Obviously it’s not the best route.”

An Irish fighter who achieves even a modicum of success can attract partisan fans who think their man is worth following regardless of how porous his defense or delicate his scar tissue. The Jewish and Italian groups that also drove US prizefighting in previous generations no longer have the same staunch loyalty to the sport. Excluding the Irish, enthusiastic crowds in recent years have come from ethnicities associated with the lower rungs of American’s socio-economic ladder, such as Mexicans, Filipinos and Puerto Ricans.

While many Irish have assimilated into the upper echelons of American society, large swathes of the community still band together for the fights, using the events as a vehicle to embrace their heritage. Boxing provides the perfect opportunity for ethnic groups to sing songs about the homeland, forget woes in a sea of alcohol and testosterone, and cheer on one of their own as he bravely takes the fight to the world.

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And so it was that those with varying degrees of Irishness traveled to Connecticut on Saturday. The crowd would have been notably smaller if Macklin was waving the Union Jack or if O'Connor chose not to emphasize his roots.

While their performances weren't overly inspiring, both Macklin and O'Connor fought like stereotypical Irishmen; game, tough and flawed enough to make the fights entertaining. Macklin's journey may be coming to an end and O'Connor will need to make some tactical adjustments if he is to extend his career. But there'll be others before long; Ireland's severe economic recession will see continued emigration and more fighters looking for support from their US-based kindred. Before that, promoters can always dream that Golovkin will spur an awakening in the Kazakh community's love for the fight game.

[Comment on this article](#)

Radam G says:

Just my piece of input. This copy is very presumptuous. I'd say about 95 percent of the Fil-Am following Da Manny does not come from the "Lower rungs of American's socio-economic ladder" anymore than the ones that do illegal cock-fighting on the U.S. mainland. "The poor Filipinos" struggling in America have an icon named Manny Pacquiao is a great storyline, but full of BULLSYET!"

The vast amount of Filipinos in America is not POOR! The poor ones can barely make it off their respected islands-- less alone to America or anywhere else. The Fil-Am are hard-working, highly-educated, highly-skilled contributors to America and the "American Dream" and the corrupted IRS. And we are everywhere at the top, but ethnocentrism of people blind them of our existence. Holla!

Raiders says:

This is truly a gutsy piece and it's a 100 percent true, boxing fans have an issue with the truth. Seriously if a poster talks about this it's an automatic banning on most sites even though it's the truth. Tribalism is okay but in a way it's a problem, if GGG were Mexican we would be talking about a million but ppv guy but even if he's the 2nd coming of Tyson he'll never get his sales. Keep up the good work boxing needs honest writers instead of cowards who act like they don't see an obvious occurrence.

Raiders says:

Chavez Jr is a bigger star than Ward, Lucas Golovkin, Garcia, Mares, Devon, Rigo and Lara.

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HBO accepted Chavez's catch weight with Vera but wouldn't accept GGGs mandatory with Vera. Look at how Radam hugs Manny insanely hard, only a coward can't admit tribalism isn't a huge issue in boxing

amayseng says:

It's not racist to have pride and root for a fighter of your Ethnic heritage.

However,

It is racist to root against a fighter for his skin color or ethnic background.

Radam G says:

The Raiders guy has some type of personality disorder and a racist issue that he is George Jefferson-TV character about. Hehehe! The dimwits that you will find trying to send this Universe into chaos are amazing. Raiders, go to the bathroom. Hehehe! Holla!

amayseng says:

Radam the (tss) universe will take care of itself.

It always does.

Raiders says:

[QUOTE=Radam G;33001]The Raiders guy has some type of personality disorder and a racist issue that he is George Jefferson-TV character about. Hehehe! The dimwits that you will find trying to send this Universe into chaos are amazing. Raiders, go to the bathroom. Hehehe! Holla![/QUOTE]

This is the ultimate nationalist, George Jefferson TV character how idiotic are you?

Bernie Campbell says:

I think this article is meant to get a little stir from its readers! Its the friggun promoters and the boxing media that play good cop bad cop with all us buttheads! How come Andre Ward being one half Irish American is being downplayed? Is the fact that his old man's race a negative aspect to his loyal AA fans? David Hays? Gennady Golokvin, Robert Gueriero? Who the heck knows? Some of this tribalism may be bad for business. So the dudes are profiled! Who started this garbage? I got no respect for the fighters that play it up! Ive got Irish blood, Golokvin is the man! Just because Maclin is Irish, Ive got to do a jig? And What about Tyson Fury? You think that loudmouth makes me proud? Boxing should not take into consideration their fans are idiots! The constant race baiting, pinning a black guy against a white guy every week on the darn television! The constant opinion of the black fighter picking the black fighter to win! The fraternities! Dumb Sam Watson! Why are these guys making Broner look like hes ignorant!

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