

HBO Pushing Hard To Impress With Fall Season

Written by Michael Woods
Friday, 23 August 2013 14:09



I plead guilty, your honor.

I spend too much time pondering, at times worrying about the state of the sport, about the fights we don't see, the stars I fear aren't going to be present to lead the way when the Mayweathers and Pacquias exit the stage, the nichification of the sport to which, I must remind myself frequently, all others aspire to.

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I will state, for the record, that I've been doing less public and solitary kvetching of late, though, because the sport is doing what it does tend to do, decade after decade. The sport is replenishing itself, and athletes are doing what the best of them do: elevating themselves, performing at a level and with such drama that they demand our attention.

I was reminded of many of the positive aspects of the sport, and the athletes, and the programming options available to such shameless addicts of the savage art and science of pugilism on Thursday, when I visited HBO headquarters, and chatted with some of the boxing brain-trust there. I got some intel on their upcoming slate, which they are referring to as their "Fall Season," and I left the building intrigued by the cabling's year-end push, and impressed with the commitment to larger blocks of content, and value, they are offering.

While I am in confession mode, I will also admit found myself thinking of that Tony Soprano line, referring to his ever-dubious mother, Livia: "Livia is like the woman with a Virginia ham under each arm, crying 'cause she hasn't got any bread." That popped up when I picked up on the move towards bundling some of the 24/7s, Face Offs and 2 Days with live fights, and "forcing" me to stay up past a wise bed-time, or succumb to the temptation to DVR, for the next day. Yeah, I was feeling bad for myself because I don't have the stamina I used to. Cry me a river, Woods...

HBO is kicking off this "Fall Season" on Saturday, Sept. 28. Julio Chavez Jr. gets back on the bus against a journeyman seeking to bury his "Friday Night Fights" tag, Bryan Vera.

One of those new brigade of bombers which HBO is making more of a push to feature, yes, perhaps at the expense of some of those pugilist-specialists who aren't as likely to manufacture a SportsCenter highlight (cough cough Rigo), will also appear, Haitian-born Canadian Adonis Stevenson (21-1 with 18 KOs). The light heavy is in against Tavoris Cloud (24-1), who is in a semi-crossroads fight, after dropping a UD to Bernard Hopkins in March. And then fans of the heavyweights get a chance to exult in a heavyweight tangle, pitting basketballer size Tyson Fury (21-0) against David Haye (26-2), who always draws numbers, most of them eyeballs belonging to people hoping his foe will shut his cocky puss. The fights will unfold in CA, and Montreal and England, which tells me the company is, I could argue, perhaps somewhat re-energized, looking to hustle that much harder to go where they need to go to snag solid fights.

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Do I love the slotting of Vera in against Junior? I don't...but as was pointed out, Junior has been off a long time, a year come fight night, so if he's got a coat of rust on him, 23-6 Vera could well be right there with the 46-1 son of the legend. As a fan, I'm hoping that Vera pleasantly surprises me.

I will have an extra Pepsi during those bouts, so I can stay up for first installment of the Marquez/Bradley 24/7, which is slated to begin at 12:30 AM, immediately following the three-bout slate. (The promo stuff says Bradley/Marquez, but I got to give a nod to the longevity of the Mexican, and place his name first, sorry for the indulgence.)

HBO comes back strong and hard with another tripleheader on Oct. 5, with old fan fave Miguel Cotto (37-4; 32 years old, one could argue perhaps an "old" 32) coming back to his old stomping grounds after dating Showtime for a spell. Some fans are thinking his opponent, Delvin Rodriguez (28-6-3), isn't of the caliber to give Cotto a workout, but along the lines of the Vera choice, I suspect Rodriguez will be as amped for a fight as he ever has been. Sometimes, you give a "lesser" light a chance, and you get magic, because that "lesser" grade boxer gives the performance of a lifetime, as they are so eager to get to the next level. (See, Provodnikov, Ruslan). By the way, I do get thee sense that HBO is on board with a Miguel Cotto-Sergio Martinez tangle early next year. I'd like your thoughts, readers, on what you think of that pairing, in our Forum.

Nebraska's top boxer, Terence Crawford (21-0), gets another crack on air, against Andrey Klimov (16-0), in a battle of unbeaten lightweights. And to satisfy the vocal souls who have bemoaned the lack of Klitschkos on HBO, the Wladimir Klitschko-Alexander Povetkin scrap will be shown, in an afternoon telecast, from Moscow. I could see Klitschko (60-3) showing more of a beast mode, trying to prove that the 26-0 Povetkin isn't actually all that different, skills-wise, than the parade of lessers little brother has been hammering since he last lost, in 2004, to Lamon Brewster. The second Marquez-Bradley 24/7 will unspool after the bouts. The orgy of content continues with Max Kellerman's "Face-Off" placing 34-1 Mike Alvarado and Ruslan Provodnikov (22-2) in close quarters. That we are seeing a "Face-Off" on a non-PPV fight is, again, a signal that a quest to provide greater value to fight fans is an HBO imperative. HBO just started collecting footage for that, I was told. For the record, this is the first time HBO will do live back to back tripleheaders, so read into that what you will, about their commitment to value and degree of competitiveness, what with Showtime stepping up their game, and budget, this year.

You can check out the weigh-in to the Marquez-Bradley event, which is being offered on pay-per-view on Oct. 12, at 6 PM Eastern the day before on HBO. That weigh-in spot will be an hour, not a half hour, as has been recent tradition. By the way, Orlando Salido will battle

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Orlando Cruz for the vacant WBO featherweight title in Vegas, on the PPV undercard. (Cue the Golden Boy devotees, who think Top Rank could and should do a better job stepping up their PPV undercard game lol. As always, I counsel those folks to see how the bouts play out, and reserve your contempt after proper investigation.)

The very next week, a bout that almost definitely promises ebbs and flows of the variety which conjures Fight of the Year chatter, Mike Alvarado-Ruslan Provodnikov, runs from the First Bank Center, in Colorado. Top Rank, the Marquez-Bradley packager, is the promoter. Both fighters were told that *Legendary Nights: The Tale of Gatti-Ward* will run following their bout, and I am told, both broke into a grin, cognizant of the symbolism and honor involved. You don't think both Alvarado and Ruslan won't entertain the notion that they'd like to surpass the immensity of drama found in *Gatti-Ward I*? After that threequel gets the *Legendary* treatment, a *2 Days*: Mikey Garcia will run. A 1:15 AM start time is the tentative target for that.

Jim Lampley will do his sixth "The Fight Game" on Friday, Oct. 25. Note that will kick off at 8:30 PM; and you can bet Lampley will have an extra bump of adrenaline from having it on primetime. He'll be able to look back at HBO's recent run, and also ahead to marquee matchups.

HBO has a date locked in, on Nov. 2. The Bieber faced destroyer Gennady Golovkin (27-0; pictured above in HBO photo, prior to demolition of Matthew Macklin June 29) will meet up with Brownsville badass Curtis Stevens (25-3), himself on a KO run, having dropped and stopped three of his last four foes in round one. Stevens politicked hard and got this gig; will he come to regret that, and ask himself, I should have been careful what I asked for? There is an open slot for another bout on that doubleheader, which will unfold at Madison Square Garden's Theater. I put on my matchmaker hat, and offered a name: how about Sergey Kovalev glove up on that night, as well? Golovkin, and Kovalev, who impressed with a thorough demolition job on Nathan Cleverly on Aug. 17...The buzz around that card would be ludicrous. The HBO gang was as intrigued by that Golovkin plus Kovalev doubleheader as I was, I dare say. It will be up to Team Kovalev, and promoter Kathy Duva to see if the concept could reach fruition, but since Stevens is a Main Events boxer, it seems a near no brainer.

Kellerman's Manny Pacquiao-Brandon Rios "Face-Off" will air following the MSG fights, and I am told, to my relief, that Brandon the Badass appeared in this session. He looked like a happy tourist when he and Manny did their press tour, but his gameface and snarliness, I hear, kicked up in the studio with Manny and Max.

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The momentum continues on Saturday, November 9, with 32-0 Mikey Garcia topping a Boxing After Dark. Nonito Donaire (31-2), too, will hop in the ring, in his first fight back after getting the short end against Guillermo Rigondeaux in April. Garcia and Donaire are both up against TBD as of this writing. WBO super feather champ Rocky Martinez, the 27-1 Puerto Rican, is in the mix to meet Garcia.

Donaire's wife, Rachel, reports to TSS that the boxer is of top grade as a daddy to their baby, Jarel, born on July 16. "The baby is an angel," she said. "And how is Nonito at changing diapers? He's real fast at it!" Does she have any idea on who he will fight? "We heard November 9 but an opponent isn't set because no one wants to fight him at 126. He can't make 122 anymore."

Demetrius Andrade gets the chance to up his buzz factor, against Vanes Martirosyan in the night's TV opener. The Pacquiao-Rios 24/7 kicks off following this tripleheader, Manny-iacs must know. Part two of that documercial runs the following Saturday, Nov. 16. HBO has a date for a fight on Nov. 16, and by process of elimination, it seems like the return of Andre Ward to the ring seems a good bet to headline. It would be a year since he last fought for a fee, as the Oakland resident tore his right shoulder training to fight Kelly Pavlik, and has been rehabbing and getting the rust off since a Jan. 4 surgery. It looked like he had risen to another level, with an offensive extravaganza against Chad Dawson on Sept. 8, 2012 (TKO10) win and it's a shame he wasn't able to quickly capitalize on the momentum. I dialed up his promoter, Dan Goossen, to try and get some intel. "By early next week, Tuesday or Wednesday at the latest I should have a handle on Andre's next fight," Goossen said. "It would be premature to target any specific date right now." Dmitri Sartison, a 30-2 Kazakhstani German resident who held the WBA world super middle crown, in 2009-2010, is in the mix to get the Ward comeback slot. Sartison fights tomorrow (Saturday), in Germany, against 38-14-4 Baker Barakat, and Goossen said he will have his eye on that one, and hopes Team HBO will too. Ward has been off for a year, the promoter said, and had a major surgery, so while he doesn't seek an ESPN level foe for the Ward return, he also wants to factor in the layoff. "Nobody has had to twist Andre's arm to fight the toughest opponents," Goossen said in reference to anyone who might be seeking Ward to come back against a top 5 type. "But we have to make sure everything is fine with the shoulder."

Whoever fills that Nov. 16 dance card, the second episode of Pacquiao/Rios 24/7 will run after the live event.

Anyone reading this likely knows that on Nov. 23, Manny Pacquiao will tell the world if he's still a top tier fighter, or has been irrevocably altered, by age, and/or by a Juan Manuel Marquez

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right hand, when he meets Brandon Rios in Macau. Don't worry yourselves over the time difference--Macau is 13 hours ahead of us EST--and just know that the Top Rank PPV will start at 9 PM, as per usual.

HBO is saving a time block for live fights for Saturday, Nov. 30, a doubleheader. Could Ward appear? Or Kovalev, perhaps? Perhaps. We are likely to get one more live card in December, I was informed.

Readers, talk to me. Thoughts? Are you feeling the HBO push toward adding value? What fights from that Fall Season that I touched on are you most pumped for? What suggestions do you have for some of the open slots? Weigh in, in our Forum!

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Radam G says:

HBO is gettin' on its mojo. Showtime is acting like a lost ho. Hehehe! Where is its pimp. Alvarez-Mayweather Bout will be a limp. YUP! I said it! People with an iota of a brain is not buying that Canelo has a CHANCE a bit. Outta him, Money May is going to beat da hebejeebeez and da S***! Holla!

amayseng says:

those are some good cards lined up despite bradley jmm being a ppv, which will bomb..

Carmine Cas says:

Nice fights to look forward, some "friendly" competition between the two rivals shall be interesting

Bernie Campbell says:

I couldn't figure out for the life of me Mr. Woods, Why for instance minutes before the Froch-Kessler epic, Why in the fch did HBO put a lead into the fight, Coming Attractions to the Liberaci Movie! Who were they trying to reach at that particular moment? Who in the world were they trying to target market! This is just a typical strategy HBO and Showtime use to attract

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innocent fight fans to their smutty agenda! Californication, Hung, etc. HBO can do a lot more for their fight fans than they do! African fighters, European Fighters, Veteran Fighters that have been depreciated for whatever reason because they don't present the corporate image! Paul Spadafora! What the fuh! Que Pasa Pindehos!

Radam G says:

Pindejos? Holla!

Bernie Campbell says:

You catch my drift Waldo!