

Snips and Snipes 22 June 2017

There is an old Chinese curse which says "may you live in interesting times". Well over the last couple of weeks we have certainly been living in interesting times in boxing. We had two major fights which ended in controversy, we had Gennady Golovkin and Saul Alvarez setting out to drum up interest in their coming fight (if you need to be "sold" on this fight you are obviously not a boxing fan) and the date for the Floyd Mayweather vs. Connor McGregor fight rolled out (if you buy this fight you are obviously not a boxing fan).

Apart from the controversy the Andre Ward vs. Sergey Kovalev fight was unremarkable. The first fight was much better. I had Kovalev one point in front but had given the sixth and seventh to Ward as Kovalev looked to be fading. The referee gave Kovalev a rough deal. On three occasions Kovalev stepped back to indicate he had been hit low and on each occasion Ward stopped also acknowledging that he had gone low. By not warning Ward the referee was almost inviting him to keep going low. You can never be 100% sure but I felt that even without the low blows Ward was on his way to a stoppage win. Kovalev made no complains. He made it clear Ward was the better fighter on the night and talked about being 34 and doing something else with his life. Naturally his team has launched a protest. They could not do otherwise. They are paid to look after Kovalev's interests. I can't see any action being taken to order a rematch and I don't believe either fighter wants one at least not in the near future.

Ward has said he is looking at cruiser or even heavy. He is not signed up to VADA CBP so we can't know what he might be smoking! There are fights at light heavy for him and perhaps even cruiser where apart from Olek Usyk the champions are not fearsome beasts. Tony Bellew is a possibility but Tony swings with the wind-he might retire, he might go up to heavyweight, he might fight Ward etc. Clean up your own house first Andre-fight Adonis Stevenson.

I have to feel sorry for Guillermo Rigondeaux. The brilliant Cuban gets labelled boring and when he finally scores a spectacular knockout he is one second out on his timing. Judging by precedents such as Rances Barthelemy vs. Argenis Mendez it is likely to end up as a No Decision and instead of moving on he will have to go over old ground. I felt sorry for the referee. The look of amazement on his face when he turned around and saw Moises Flores lying spread-eagled on the canvas was almost comical. The difference between a punch landing before, on or after the bell is a split second and it would have been impossible for Rigondeaux to have stopped that last punch so the real question is did he launch it after the bell?

It can't get much better than Gennady Golovkin vs. Saul Alvarez. Two great boxers-future Hall of Fame inductees who are both still at their peak and who love to fight aggressively. It's a 50/50 fight for me so my neck is not going to emerge over the top button of my shirt anytime soon.

For me like so many others Mayweather vs. McGregor is a non-event which I wish wasn't going to happen. It will prove nothing. There is no title at stake. There are no redeeming features. What puzzles me is why I feel so strongly. If I don't care who wins why am I angry about it. There is a lot of anger in the boxing fraternity over this

charade and it is being condemned by many big names in boxing. I don't believe it will hurt boxing unless you feel that a knock to Mayweather's dignity is important or are we worried that if McGregor wins it will mean that UFC is better than boxing. I find myself where I am totally a'gin it and I am not sure why I am so totally a'gin it-but I am. It is also irritating that they have selected 26 August the same night as Miguel Cotto's fight against Yoshihiro Kamegai. It has to hurt that show as you can be sure that boxing, UFC fans and general sports fans will buy Mayweather vs. McGregor in sufficient numbers to make it one of the largest sporting events in history-and I am still a'gin it. The WBO are in favour which does not surprise me at all.

Mauricio Sulaiman has been talking up an Anthony Joshua vs. Deontay Wilder fight. Sure it is a good fight but don't you think after five voluntary defences Wilder should fight a mandatory challenger before he looks outside the WBC ratings for an opponent?

The WBA have stripped Beibut Shumenov of their secondary cruiser title and upgraded Yunier Dorticos to their secondary champion. They have also ordered their super champion Denis Lebedev to fight Mark Flanagan, their No 8, with the winner to fight Dorticos so that they then meet their stated aim of one champion in each division. Shumenov has not fought for 13 months and reportedly has an eye injury that may force his retirement. The fact that their super champion Lebedev was beaten by Marat Gassiev in December is ignored as that fight was only for the IBF title which makes it all a mockery. As for their one champion why do they show "vacant" against the secondary titles in four divisions if they are trying to drop them altogether?

Usual blatant manipulation of their ratings by the WBA saw Paul Smith go from nowhere in March to No 5 in April even though he had not fought since September. It wouldn't be so bad if they just slipped him in at No 15 but subtlety has never been their strong point.

A fight with David Lemieux would certainly give Billy Joe Saunders a chance to boost his profile. No fault of his that Avtandil Khurtsidze got arrested but by 16 September the scheduled date for his next fight he will have had only one fight in 21 months. He and Lemieux have been exchanging barbs but the timing has to be right for Saunders to take on a big puncher like Lemieux and unless the WBO order it a voluntary defence in September and Lemieux after that might work out better for him but he must be desperate to get back into action.

The HBO show on 9 September will feature five of the top super flyweights in the world with Ramon Gonzalez vs. Srisaket, Carlos Cuadras vs. Juan Francisco Estrada and Naoya Inoue vs. Antonio Nieves. Gonzalez will be looking for revenge for his controversial loss to Srisaket which cost him his WBC title. Cuadras and Estrada will be fighting for the right to meet the winner for the WBC title with Inoue defending his WBO title against Antonio Nieves. The WBO have not yet managed to switch Nieves from No 7 bantam to somewhere at super fly since he lost to Nikolai Potapov in March but they will.

The date for the return fight between Vasyl Lomachenko and Omar Salido is set for 8 August. The brilliant Ukrainian will be looking to get revenge for his lone loss as a

pro when Salido came in overweight and roughed up Lomachenko on the way to a disputed split decision. The 36-year-old Salido has had wars of attrition with Terdsak, Roma Martinez and Francisco Vargas since then and for me Lomachenko will get the win I thought he deserved the first time.

Also rolled out for our pleasure is the Adrien Broner vs. Mikey Garcia fight for 27 July in New York. An intriguing fight that Broner dare not lose. He struggled to beat Adrian Granados on a split decision in February and Garcia is a much tougher proposition. I would take him to easily beat anyone at lightweight and be the only one capable of giving Terence Crawford a real challenger at super light.

The WBA have called for purse bids for the return fight between Jamie McDonnell and Liborio Solis for their secondary bantam title. They met in November with McDonnell winning the unanimous decision which proved controversial in some circles but which I though McDonnell won clearly. The minimum purse bid is set at \$120,000 with McDonnell share of the purse 75% and Solis 25%. The problem is that although a good fight at a figure of over \$120,000 it is only viable as a support to a much bigger fight

The supporting fights for the 1 July fight between Manny Pacquiao and Jeff Horn will see Jerwin Ancajas defending his IBF super fly title against his No 3 challenger Teiru Kinoshita. Ancajas gave Pacquiao his first world champion as a promoter. The Japanese fighter is ranked No 3 although the first two places are vacant. He can't go into one of those slots as he has not beaten a rated fighter-but it is OK to put him No 3! Irish hope Michael Conlan will face Jarrett Owen and Jonel Dapidran, a cousin of Pacquiao, will also be on the card.

The worrying part about signing up to the VADA CBP is that you might actually get a random test. That's the case for former European champion Dennis Ceylan. The Dane tested positive for cocaine and now waits to find out what punishment is in store for him.

Still on Danish boxing Mikkel Kessler has ruled himself out of the World Boxing Super Series. Quite sensibly he decided that after four years of inactivity he would need a lot more time to prepare before entering that competition.

On almost the same day as Kessler made that decision former WBA champion Firat Arslan said he wanted to take part in the tournament. The 46-year-old German fights 31-1 Goran Delic on 15 July for the vacant WBO European title and is hoping to impress there to earn an invitation.

Still in that part of the world Swede Erik Skoglund has despaired of landing a title shot at light heavy so has decided to move down to super middle. Not sure who he is targeting but there are very few easy avenues at super middle whereas if Andre Ward moved up there would be three vacant titles at light heavy.

Former WBC super middle champion Sakio Bika is returning to action. The Cameroon-born Australian tackles Australian Luke Sharp (14-5-3) in Sydney on 8 July for the vacant WBC Asian Boxing Council title. It will be the first fight for over two years for Bika.

On 1 July Oscar de La Hoya will be heading down to Villa Mercedes in Argentina for the inauguration of a new sports centre there. His cousin Diego will fight in the main event of opening show against Alan Isaias Luques.

Fights to watch out for: In his first fight since losing his WBO title to Olek Usyk in September former WBO cruiser champion Krzys Glowacki (26-1) returns to action on Saturday against unbeaten Turk Hizni Altunkaya (29-0). August 15 Kyoto Shinsuke Yamanaka (27-0-2) meets unbeaten Mexican Luis Nery (23-0). It will be defence No 13 of his WBC bantam title for Yamanaka.

Interesting to see that the EBU have set a date of 19 July for purse offers for the fight between Ahmed El Mousaoui and Frankie Gavin for the vacant European Union welterweight title as Gavin makes another effort to get his career rolling again.

Late substitutions are the bane of the sport. Last weekend in Estonia there was to be a fight between Robert Helenius and Ian Lewison for the WBC International Silver title. Not a bad fight until things fell apart. With Lewisham not able to fight the search went on for a last minute replacement. One was found that was acceptable to the WBC but was not acceptable to Helenius and the only name left on the board was a poor opponent in Evgeny Orlov leaving the choice between a bad fight and no fight and probably no show so a choice between a rock and a hard place for the WBC. Helenius vs. Orlov went on for the Silver title and no one got hurt so sometimes we have to work with shades of grey in this sport.

WBC super featherweight champion Miguel Berchelt has gone to jail. Don't panic! He has visited a jail in Hermosillo, Mexico giving exhibitions and talking to young inmates about how with work and discipline they can fulfil their dreams. He has fitted this into his training for a title defence against Takashi Miura in Inglewood on 15 July. The boxing fraternity in South Africa lost two of its stalwarts in Freddy Rafferty and Len Hunt. Rafferty, a former South African cruiser champion, scored some good wins over opposition such as Piet Crous and Tony Fulilangi in a 14 year career finishing with a 32-14-2 record. Hunt was a top class referee but his major contribution came in his work with the South Africa National Boxing Control Commission as they rebuilt the sport in a post apartheid period. RIP gentlemen. The latest news on German boxer Eduard Gutknecht is not good. Since collapsing after his fight with George Groves and undergoing extensive brain surgery in England Gutknecht is now back home in Germany. Although there has been slight progress his condition is still serious. He can hear and see and has slight movement of his head and arms he is unable to speak. Boxing people from around the world have made donations to help his wife and three children at this time including a generous donation from George Groves and his team.

Italian Bepi Ros is another undergoing a bad time. He has serious health and financial problems and again the 74-year-old former Italian heavyweight champion has found the boxing fraternity generous with their help.