

## Snips and Snipes 8 February 2018

The threat that the IOC may drop boxing from the 2020 Olympic Games should come as no surprise. For a few years now the AIBA which has responsibility for administering International "amateur" boxing-but let's not kid ourselves the Olympics Games are no longer for amateurs-have too long been focusing on making money rather than developing the sport. For a few years they have through the WSB and other initiatives helped make the transition from AIBA to professional boxing easier for elite boxers. However they have failed to tackle the quality of judging and refereeing and have failed to put in place and to police internal controls leaving themselves open to allegations of mismanagement and profligacy taking the organisation to the edge of bankruptcy. The criticism over their handling of boxing at the Rio Olympics had already put them under the IOC spotlight and then they went and shot themselves in the foot over the appointment of an interim President . They selected a man who has been sanctioned by the United States Treasury Department for alleged links to a major "transnational criminal organisation". I can almost imagine the conversation "We need an interim President let's appoint Gafur Rakhimov" with one voice saying " isn't he sanctioned by the United States Treasury Department for alleged link to a major "transnational criminal organisation". "Yes sounds just the man for the job"!

A ban from the Olympics would be a huge blow for boxing's prestige but it is more difficult to decide whether it would have any repercussions for professional boxing. Certainly many of today's top boxers have competed at the Games. From the 2012 Games seven gold medallists: Zou Shiming, Luke Campbell, Vasyl Lomachenko, Ryota Murata, Egor Mekhontsev, Olek Usyk and Anthony Joshua turned professional with Shiming, Lomachenko, Murata, Usyk and Joshua winning versions of world titles. Five silver medal winners: Tugstsogt Nyambayar, John Joe Nevin, Denis Berinchyk, Fred Evans and Esquiva Falcao and ten bronze medallists Paddy Barnes, Mikhail Aloyan, Michael Conlan, Taras Shelestyuk, Anthony Ogogo, Yamaguchi Falcao, Olek Gvozdyk, Tervel Pulev and Ivan Dychko are pros. Fighters such as Andrew Selby, Oscar Valdez, Felix Verdejo, Jeff Horn, Errol Spence, Artur Beterbiev, Rau'shee Warren, Josh Taylor, Anthony Yigit, Isaac Dogboe and many others did not even medal.

The Games are a major showcase for talents such as these but there is nothing to say that these fighters would not have come through into the professional ranks if there had not been and Olympic Games. For me a World Championship gold medal is every bit as hard to win. At the 2012 Olympics you would need to be victorious in a maximum of five fights to win a gold medal but at the 2011 World Championships the figure would be seven fights. Fighters such as Joshua, Murata and Campbell did not make it to the World Championships gold standard and Barnes, Conlan, Horn, Valdez, Taylor, Yigit, Ogogo, Spence, Evans, Beterbiev, Joseph Parker, Naoya Inoue and Khalid Yafai did not win medals.

However an Olympic gold medal is the dream, the pinnacle and without that dream perhaps some boxers would turn professional earlier and more worrying some without the glint of gold and the money it can be turned into might just decide the risk

is not worth the reward and try another sport and be lost to boxing. The only people who can keep boxing in the Olympics are the AIBA. To try to start another organisation to compete with them would just cause chaos. The WBC talked about doing it when the AIBA decided to let professionals compete at the Olympics and that never even got off the ground but with their track record relying on the AIBA to clean house is a depressing thought based on their track record. Overlooked in the threat of a ban is that the IOC would insist on only eight division for male boxers which will also have an effect.

There is talk of Floyd Mayweather fighting in the MMA and perhaps even a return with Conor McGregor. I felt it was against when McGregor fought Mayweather as it made a farce out of boxing but if Mayweather wants to try MMA I have no problem with that. He might even get his butt kicked-literally. He is suffering from the condition that hits many boxers when they retire in that they miss the limelight and Mayweather's ego must find that hard to bear.

WBSS really is a gift to boxing that just keeps on giving. Murat Gassiev vs. Yunier Dorticos was an excellent fight. It was not a thrill a minute but high quality work with neither man wasting a punch. I was surprised that Gassiev fought on the back foot for so much of the fight but he boxed intelligently and paced the fight better than Dorticos and has a good chance against Olek Usyk.

I can't wait for George Groves vs. Chris Eubank Jr. for me it is a 50/50 fight and one that might never have happened as it would probably foundered on the money split. The WSBB have made the reward worth the risk. It will be interesting to see where the WBSS goes next. I can't see them going to the heavyweights, the light heavyweights or the middleweights. The super welterweights might be doable but right now there is a lack of big names in the division and that applies to a number of other divisions. The featherweights with Gary Russell, Carl Frampton/or Nonito Donaire, Leo Santa Cruz, Abner Mares, Lee Selby/or Josh Warrington, Oscar Valdez/or Scott Quigg and Joseph Diaz would be an interesting mix but the cruisers and super middles happened because there was no real USA input. That meant that the participants had no contractual ties to major cable outlets and there was no problem such as might have occurred if Top Rank or Golden Boy did not want their fighters to take part.

Typically the WBA took away Denis Lebedev's title and stuck him on the shelf out of the way so that Gassiev vs. Dorticos could be a unification fight. Hope they promised him something nice for getting them out of that fix.

No opponent named yet for Manny Pacquiao's return to the ring on 14 April in New York under Jeff Horn vs. Terrence Crawford. Initially the name of Lucas Matthisse was mentioned but that seems unlikely now. There is talk of Pacquiao vs. Vasyl Lomachenko later in the year. For the Horn fight Pacquiao was 145lbs and for the Guillermo Rigondeaux fight Lomachenko was 129lbs so it would probably be a catchweight contest but I don't think it is a good fight for Pacquiao or the right one for Lomachenko but it may come down to how much money it might make. I guess Manny could cut a leg off.

Plenty of signs that Tyson Fury is working hard to get himself back into fighting condition which will certainly liven things up in the division. After over two years out of the ring it is impossible to say whether he will return to the conditioning he showed in outboxing Wlad Klitschko. Even as a joke his mentioning Antonio Tarver and Shannon Briggs as possible opponents is in the worse possible taste. Does he really want to fight a drugs cheat? That would go really well in view the problems he has only recently been able to put behind him.

The WBC have got themselves in a fix. For some reason they have approved Miguel Berchelt defending his super featherweight title against Ghanaian Maxwell Awuku.

This despite the fact that Awuku is not in their top 15. In fact he is not in their top 20. In fact he is not in their top 40-so unrated. I watched Awuku give Daud Yordan a good fight in 2015 but since then he has had just two fights in 2015, one in 2016 and one in 2017 all against local opposition with very poor records so naturally he has not done enough to deserve to be rated but is acceptable as a world title challenger! Even if he is coming in as a substitute there must be 40 rated fighters checking their phones to see if they missed a call and when they find they didn't they must wonder what the points is of having ratings if they get totally ignored and by-passed.

Sauerland Promotions have had a prominent role in the WBSS but all has not been going well for them in other areas. So far IBF light heavyweight title challenger Enrico Koelling, former interim WBA super welter champion Jack Culcay and unbeaten middleweight Stefan Haertel have all deserted Sauerland for other promoters. Sauerland have said they will soon announce new names for their team but these were three of the best cards in their deck,

One of Sauerland's star names, Vincent Feigenbutz, has been frozen out. No he is not leaving Sauerland and in fact he fights South African Ryno Liebenberg on 17 February. Feigenbutz has been in a very strange camp in preparation for the fight. He has built himself an igloo and sleeps there and does his sparring in a ring built in the snow. He has also included locust in his diet. I know there is snow business like snow business Vincent but this is the boxing business.

For those interested in money the purses for the Jose Linares vs. Mercito Gesta show were as follows: Linares \$300,000, Gesta \$70,000, Lucas Matthyse \$210,000, Teerachai \$40,000.

Argentinian TV is running a 13 part TV drama on the life of Carlos Monzon. A truly great fighter and one of the best middleweights of all time but not the nicest of men who went to prison for tossing his wife off a hotel balcony. The good, the very good and the ugly.

I can't see the sense in David Price taking the fight with Alex Povetkin. After his crushing loss to Christian Hammer in February last year I thought he might hang up his gloves. However he returned in December in what I thought would be the first of a few not too testing outings against very modest opposition. That seemed sensible but to now go in with Povetkin that seems senseless.

Fights to watch out for: Excellent British middleweight clash will see Tommy Langford and Jack Arnfield fighting for the British middles title under Groves vs. Eubank. Also on February 17 in Las Vegas Ray Robinson vs. Yordenis Ugas. On the

same night in El Paso unbeaten Caleb Plant fights Rogelio Medina in an IBF eliminator at super middle. Under Oscar Valdez vs. Scott Quigg in Carson on 10 March 20-0 Andy Vences vs. 17-0 Erick Deleon and Andy Ruiz returns for the first time since his majority decision loss to Joseph Parker in December 2016 against Devin Vargas. The unification fight at super welter between WBA champion Erislandy Lara and IBF champion Jarrod Hurd will be on 7 April but no venue yet