

A Boxing Fan's Dream – A Return to Sanity

By Dan Cuoco

I had a dream last night that boxing regained its sanity. The world's leading boxing writers and broadcasters, fed up with the alphabet organizations, held an international boxing symposium to discuss boxing's ills and what was needed to bring boxing back to the mainstream. Also invited to the symposium were noted ring physicians, trainers, and representatives of international boxing commissions. The consensus of that august body was that boxing needs to get back to its roots; meaning ignoring the alphabet boxing organizations, only recognizing lineal champions ¹ and returning to the original eight weight classifications. Moreover, it recognized that the major problem with boxing today is that, with four or more organizations recognizing their own champions in 17 weight classifications, there are, at a minimum, 68 champions – 68 champions, ugh!! No wonder boxing fans are confused and it's so difficult to build a fan base.

In order for my dream to come true, I believe one must return to boxing's pre-alphabet era when being "*Champion*" meant something. Although there were abuses during the pre-alphabet era (for instance, Charley Burley was frozen out of a title shot and it took Archie Moore over 18 years to fight for the title) the basic structure of boxing was sound.

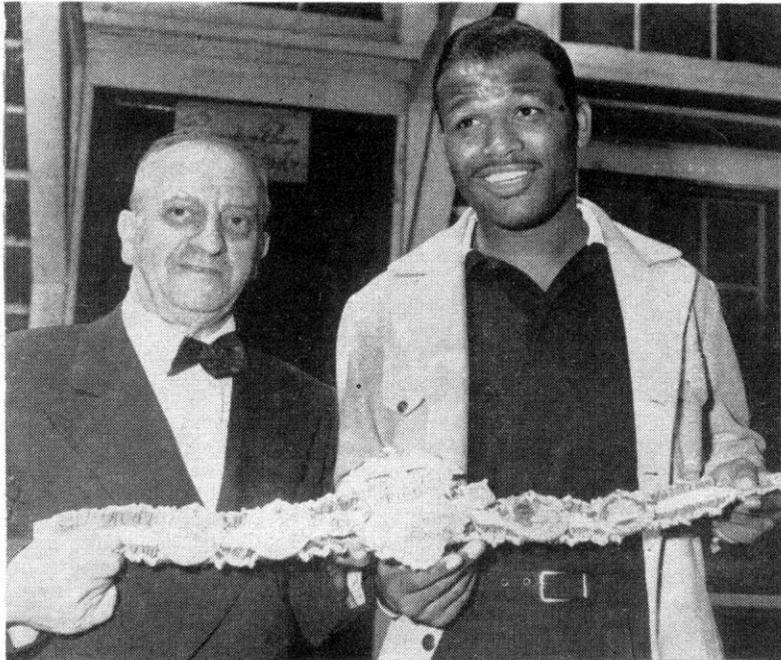
During Ring Magazine's golden era (Nat Fleischer's reign as Editor) it was known as "The Bible of Boxing" and its "World Ratings" were the most respected in boxing. Ring Magazine's stance was simple. "*Titles should have the Tiffany touch, in a rough sort of way. Titles are won-in the ring - not donated, borrowed or bought, with utter disregard for rightful owners, just claims and the feelings of the paying public. They are a trust, belonging to no one individual and with no one body, as the boxing world is set up, having the right to proclaim a champion or participants in a match for a vacant crown. In the end it is the public who give sanction and blessing to a champion, accepting, or rejecting what is foisted upon them.*" ²

The reason for returning to the eight original weight classifications is two-fold; (1) to make the championships meaningful again, and (2) to eliminate heavier fighters from gaining an unfair advantage by fighting in lower weight classifications (case in point: Gatti-Gamache, February 26, 2000).

If Arturo Gatti is truly a welterweight or a middleweight, then he should be fighting in either of those divisions. The supposed reason the junior or super divisions were created was to allow fighters to fight in divisions natural to their body weight. We all know the real reason for their creation was not so noble. Instead, it was a way for the alphabet boys to get more sanctioning fees.

My vision is to create one world wide rating system administered by a panel of boxing experts and chosen by the world's leading sports writers and broadcasters. The ranking system would assume a status similar to the legendary Ring Magazine's International World Ratings. These ratings would be *the international ranking system* and would replace all other independent rating systems. Recognition of this new system by every boxing publication and broadcast medium would – I hope – force the top rated fighters to face each other in order to gain worldwide fan acceptance as lineal world champion. The elimination of all references to the alphabet titles by all boxing publications and broadcast media would neuter them. They would die a slow death by omission. Under this scenario, if a fighter like Roy Jones, Jr. truly wanted worldwide recognition as champion of his weight class he would be forced to fight the lineal champion (Dariusz Miszczalczewski). Moreover, neither fighter would have to pay a sanctioning fee for a title that should belong to the paying customer – the boxing public. For instance, the WBC charges 3 percent of a fighter's purse. Why would fighters making multi-million dollar purses want to give the alphabet bandits such exorbitant amounts of money? For example, Oscar De La Hoya's sanctioning fee to the WBC for the Felix Trinidad fight was \$600,000. This is ludicrous!

I would envision each fighter engaged in a championship fight being charged a small fixed fee to cover the cost of both a championship belt patterned after the traditional championship belts of the past, and a press conference publicizing the awarding of The Lineal World Championship Belt. The award ceremony would be held in the city, state or country the champion resides and presented by a writer from the fighter's locale such as Bernard Fernandez (Pennsylvania), Fabian Weber (Germany), Ron Borges (Massachusetts), Michael Katz (New York), Joe Koizumi (Japan), Ray Wheatley (Australia) and Reg Guttridge (Great Britain).



A Lineal Championship Belt Presentation Ceremony from the Past.

Nat Fleischer, Ring Editor (left), poses with Sugar Ray Robinson to whom he awarded the middleweight championship belt which Ray won when he stopped Randy Turpin. It was the 154th such award made by "The Ring" and was presented to Ray at his Pompton Lakes training camp.

I believe these coordinated efforts would allow Boxing to regain its popularity and respect in the sporting community by forcing the best fighters to face each other for true public recognition. Furthermore, this should also reduce the amount of mismatches that are being perpetrated on the public in the guise of so-called world championship bouts.

For illustration purposes, here is what the eight division ratings might look like.

WORLD RATINGS

HEAVYWEIGHTS WORLD CHAMPION LENNOX LEWIS

- 1- WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO
- 2- CHRIS BYRD
- 3- KIRK JOHNSON
- 4- HASIM RAHMAN
- 5- JAMEEL MC LINE
- 6- FRES OQUENDO
- 7- DAVID TUA
- 8- EVANDER HOLLYFIELD
- 9- MIKE TYSON
- 10- JOHN RUIZ

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS WORLD CHAMPION DARIUSZ MICHALCZEWSKI

- 1- ROY JONES
- 2- ERIC HARDING
- 3- JOE CALZAGHE
- 4- SVEN OTTKE
- 5- ANTONIO TARVER
- 6- BYRON MITCHELL
- 7- ANYWUN ECHOLS
- 8- JULIO GONZALEZ
- 9- ERIC LUCAS
- 10- CLINTON WOODS

**MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WORLD CHAMPION
BERNARD HOPKINS**

- 1- FELIX TRINIDAD
- 2- OSCAR DE LA HOYA
- 3- FERNANDO VARGAS
- 4- RONALD WINKY WRIGHT
- 5- WILLIAM JOPPY
- 6- HOWARD EASTMAN
- 7- HARRY SIMON
- 8- KEITH HOLMES
- 9- BRONCO MC CART
- 10- ARMAND KRAJNC

**WELTERWEIGHTS
WORLD CHAMPION
VERNON FORREST**

- 1- SHANE MOSLEY
- 2- KOSTYA TSZYU
- 3- ANDREW LEWIS
- 4- ZAB JUDAH
- 5- ANTONIO MARGARITO
- 6- ANTONIO DIAZ
- 7- BEN TACKIE
- 8- DEMARCUS CORLEY
- 9- CORY SPINKS
- 10- SHARMBA MITCHELL

**LIGHTWEIGHTS
VACANT**

- 1- FLOYD MAYWEATHER JR
- 2- JOSE LUIS CASTILLO
- 3- ACELINO FREITAS
- 4- JOEL CASMAYOR
- 5- STEVIE JOHNSTON
- 6- PAUL SPADAFORA
- 7- JESUS CHAVEZ
- 8- JUAN LAZCANO
- 9- ARTHUR GRIGORIAN
- 10- PHILLIP N'DOU

**FEATHERWEIGHTS
MARCO ANTONIO BARRERA**

- 1- NASEEM HAMED
- 2- ERIK MORALES
- 3- JUAN MANUAL MARQUEZ
- 4- JOHNNY TAPIA
- 5- MANNY PACQUIANO
- 6- PAULIE AYALA
- 7- CLARENCE BONES ADAMS
- 8- DERRICK GAINER
- 9- JOHN MICHAEL JOHNSON
- 10- JULIO PABLO CHACON

**BANTAMWEIGHTS
WORLD CHAMPION
VACANT**

- 1- TIM AUSTIN
- 2- VEERAPOL SAHAPROM
- 3- EIDY MOYA
- 4- RAFAEL MARQUEZ
- 5- MARK JOHNSON
- 6- JOHNNY BRED AHL
- 7- MAURICIO MARTINEZ
- 8- FELIX MACHADO
- 9- ADAN VARGAS
- 10- JORGE JULIO

**FLYWEIGHTS
WORLD CHAMPION
PONSACLEK WONJONGKAM**

- 1- RICARDO LOPEZ
- 2- ERIC MOREL
- 3- FERNANDO MONTIEL
- 4- ROSENDO ALVAREZ
- 5- MASIBUELE MAKEPULA
- 6- IRENE PACHECO
- 7- BEBIS MEMDOZA
- 8- JORGE ARCE
- 9- JOSE ANTONIO AGUIRRE
- 10- YEOSUM CHOI

But unfortunately this still doesn't go far enough. There are two other areas that also need attention if we are to return to sanity. They are bad decisions and the pre-fight weigh-in.

Bad decisions have beleaguered boxing for over 90 years. A number of boxing writers and commentators have recommended developing a ranking system for officials similar to the system used in baseball. In baseball only the top umpires work the playoffs and World Series. Accordingly, it makes sense that boxing follow baseball's lead and only assign top rated referees and judges to fights of significant importance.

Official weigh-ins have been getting a lot of ink since the Gatti-Gamache fight. Currently, weigh-ins are taking place 36 hours prior to fight time. The reason is supposedly for safety – specifically to eliminate the harmful effects of dehydration by affording fighters time to rehydrate themselves before the fight. In order to contend with this, I've heard that the Nevada Athletic Commission is contemplating having a second weigh-in the day of the fight and limiting a fighter to 7 percent weight gain. If such a practice were in effect during the Arturo

Gatti - Joey Gamache fight, Gatti would not have been allowed to weigh more than 150 pounds. This seems like a reasonable compromise and should be considered universally.

In order for my dream to come through, boxers such as Bernard Hopkins, Oscar De La Hoya, Roy Jones, Jr., Vernon Forrest, Shane Mosley, Kosta Tszzy and Naseem Hamed must take a stand against the alphabet boys; boxing writers with international influence and respect such as Ron Borges, Al Bernstein, Michael Katz, Bernard Fernandez, Pedro Fernandez, Nigel Collins, Fabian Weber, Ray Wheatly, Joe Koizumi, Jack Welsh, Graham Houston, Bert Sugar, Wally Matthews, Reg Guttridge, and Ken Kolasinski must not give the alphabet boys any press and stand behind the new rating system. Broadcasters including Max Kellerman, Brian Kenny, Bob Papa, Teddy Atlas, Jim Lampley, Larry Merchant, Steve Albert, Bobby Czyz, Barry Tompkins, Rich Marrata, Sean O'Grady, and Barry McGuigan also need to follow suit.

Who will champion the cause? Who will be the catalyst for change? If you feel as I do, then let your voices be heard.

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References:

¹ Lineal World Champions. The Cyber Boxing Zone, February 9, 2002.

² Salak, J. The Ring. Vol XXXV September 1956, No 8. Page 10, "Bogus Title Bouts"