

"Fighting Words" - Floyd Mayweather's Believe It or Not

by David P. Greisman

Guess who's back. Back again. Money's back. Tell a friend. Guess who's back. Guess who's back. Guess who's back.

Nobody expected Floyd Mayweather Jr. to stay retired for long - probably not even Mayweather himself.

It's not yet official, though it might as well be.

Mayweather wants to fight again, and he wants to do so soon. Sources have told multiple boxing writers that Mayweather is looking at July 11 for his first fight back.

If it's true, that would mean Mayweather will have opted out of this latest retirement before its first year had passed. That said, this retirement has already lasted longer than the rest, though it's been yet another episode of Floyd Mayweather's 'Believe It or Not.'

'Here we go again,' Mayweather said Nov. 4, 2006, speaking to press following his defeat of then-welterweight champion Carlos Baldomir. Mayweather wasn't referring to what would become his penchant for retiring, though the sentence seems prescient in hindsight.

'I'm five-time world champion, four different weight classes,' Mayweather said after adding the 147-pound lineage to his world titles at 140, 135 and 130. 'I'm going to keep moving on and keep beating the people they put in front of me. They say 'Oscar De La Hoya.' That's the name.'

And then he abruptly broke into tears.

Mayweather said he had thought about retiring seven months prior, after he'd beaten Zab Judah. He had been thinking about retiring for the past year, he said.

Six months after beating Baldomir, he outpointed Oscar De La Hoya, earning his biggest paycheck ever. Afterward, he made good on his word.

'I've done everything that I wanted to do in the sport,' Mayweather said on May 5, 2007, at the press conference following the De La Hoya fight. 'I came from junior lightweight. I beat the best at 130. I beat the best at 135. I beat the best at 140. I beat the best at 147. He De La Hoya was the best at 154. I beat the best at 154. I made a ton of money in the sport of boxing, not just this fight, but over the years. As of right now, Floyd Mayweather is officially retired from the sport of boxing.'

He came back within months, signing to fight Ricky Hatton. They fought Dec. 8, 2007, with Mayweather knocking Hatton out in the 10th round. Afterward, retirement came up again, though this time Mayweather spoke in terms of a sabbatical. Mayweather said he would take two years off, with 2008 and 2009 dedicated to other ventures.

Within weeks, plans for a second De La Hoya bout were revealed.

That deal never got done. Mayweather issued a press release June 6, 2008, announcing his departure - for good this time, he said.

'I have decided to permanently retire from boxing,' Mayweather said in the statement. 'This decision was not an easy one for me to make, as boxing is all I have done since I was a child. However, these past few years have been extremely difficult for me to find the desire and joy to continue in the sport.'

'I have said numerous times and after several of my fights over the past two years that I might not fight again,' he said. 'At the same time, I loved competing and winning, and also wanted to continue my career for the fans, knowing they were there for me and enjoyed watching me fight. However, after many sleepless nights and intense soul-searching, I realized I could no longer base my decision on anything but my own personal happiness, which I no longer could find.'

One could believe it. Or not. Some felt Mayweather was using his retirement to get leverage at the bargaining table. De La Hoya signed to face Pacquiao instead.

Like the fairytale boy who cried 'Wolf,' Mayweather's credibility was shot.

For good reason.

This past December, Mayweather watched as Pacquiao stopped De La Hoya after eight rounds of one-sided action. That night, Mayweather called family members, a call in which 'he breathlessly asked a cousin whether his father, Floyd Sr., might be interested in co-training him for a clash with Pacquiao,' David Mayo, a boxing scribe who has covered Mayweather since his amateur days, wrote for ringtv.com.

Mayweather's target return date of July 11 gives him time to see who wins the May 2 bout between Pacquiao and Ricky Hatton. Presumably, Mayweather wants the winner, according to Thomas Hauser of SecondsOut.com and MaxBoxing.com, citing talks between Al Haymon, who is Mayweather's adviser, and HBO.

Hauser, whose inside sources at HBO have led to multiple hard-hitting articles, reports that Haymon wants Mayweather to have a tune-up fight on the network's 'World Championship Boxing' series instead of on a pay-per-view, 'possibly because poor pay-per-view numbers would undermine Mayweather's negotiating position for a late 2009 fight against the winner of Pacquiao-Hatton.'

'The problem,' Hauser wrote, 'is Floyd wants pay-per-view money for an HBO 'World Championship Boxing' fight.'

The other problem is that July 11 is the target date for a proposed HBO broadcast featuring former middleweight and light heavyweight champion Bernard Hopkins against cruiserweight champion Tomasz Adamek, Hauser wrote.

Dan Rafael of ESPN.com confirms all of the above with an independent report citing his own sources, and he adds that Mayweather is also looking at facing Shane Mosley or Juan Manuel Marquez, both of whom have called Mayweather out.

HBO president Ross Greenburg told Rafael he was neither confirming nor denying whether an adviser to Mayweather had contacted the network about a summer fight.

'I'm not going to comment,' Greenburg said to Rafael. 'Call me back in a few weeks.'

Mayweather is now 32 years old, still the owner of an unblemished record of 39 wins, 25 by way of knockout, with no losses. In the past, when talking of retirement, he has mentioned his financial security. But Mayweather has made a habit of flaunting his riches, be it via gambling or by acquiring status symbols such as pricy jewelry.

Some \$7 million of that jewelry was stolen from his Las Vegas home last year in a burglary. Mayweather also owes the Internal Revenue Service \$6.1 million in back taxes.

Money may not be a factor. Perhaps Mayweather, after decades in boxing, has spent enough time out of the ring that he misses the familiar routines of training, the rush of competition, the prospect of a challenge. Perhaps the manner in which Pacquiao beat De La Hoya, taking Mayweather's former spot atop the pound-for-pound throne, made Mayweather anxious to prove his superiority.

Whatever reason Mayweather gives, whether people believe it or not, he should soon be back.

It's not yet official, but it might as well be.

The 10 Count

1. For those keeping track at home:

March 30, 2008: Floyd Mayweather Jr. and Ric Flair appear at WrestleMania 24. Mayweather beats The Big Show. Ric Flair loses to Shawn Michaels.

March 31, 2008: Flair retires from the ring with a farewell on WWE's 'Monday Night Raw.'

June 6, 2008: Mayweather withdraws from an anticipated rematch with Oscar De La Hoya, announcing his retirement from boxing.

Few expected Flair not to have wrestled again nearly a year later, but his retirement's apparently stuck.

Few expected Mayweather not to box again, and nearly 10 months later his retirement's apparently done.

2. Just as Mayweather never fully moved on from boxing, boxing never fully moved on from Mayweather.

Since few believed Mayweather would stay retired, fighters continued to mention his name, hoping to goad him into returning, hoping to earn part of the lucrative payday that could come from facing him. So while the return of such a marketable personality and transcendent talent would be good for boxing, it would only be a short-term stimulus for a sport that needs long-term growth.

Just like the heavyweight division needed to get beyond Mike Tyson, the lower weight classes must move on past De La Hoya and Mayweather, building new rivalries, creating new superstars.

3. Perhaps it was a good thing that the broadcast of Vitali Klitschko's heavyweight title bout against Juan Carlos Gomez got moved from airing at 5 p.m. this past Saturday on ESPN to 6 p.m. on ESPN Classic.

For casual fans or interested viewers who otherwise may have tuned in to the Worldwide Leader in Sports, they would've seen a prime example of the dreadful excuse for action so common today in what was once boxing's marquee division.

This isn't reminiscing about the days of Muhammad Ali, George Foreman or even Mike Tyson. Think back to the early '90s, when boxing's big men still moved fluidly around the ring and punched in combinations. Watch the trilogy between Riddick Bowe and Evander Holyfield. And then understand why bouts like that between Klitschko and Gomez do nothing to inspire, little to excite.

At times, Klitschko and Gomez resembled two grizzly bears standing on their hind legs, slowly swatting at each other. Klitschko ultimately pulled away, scoring a ninth-round technical-knockout victory, but it is difficult to pull moments out which would stand out as 'highlights.'

4. I didn't buy this past Saturday's pay-per-view featuring Roy Jones Jr. against Omar Sheika in the main event and a combination of boxing matches and mixed martial arts bouts on the undercard. I didn't see Jones stop Sheika within five rounds.

I didn't need to. I knew what would happen.

Somehow, I could justify spending \$30 to watch the Harlem Globetrotters take on the Washington Generals. But not Jones-Sheika.

5. Boxers Behaving Badly, part one: William Medei, whose boxing career included fights with a handful of recognizable names, was arrested last week and charged with two counts of first-degree murder for killing a 42-year-old woman and her 13-year-old son, according to the Miami Herald.

Medei, 52, lived with the woman, Renee Bader, and her son, Josh. Medei was not Josh's biological father, though he had recently married and moved in with Bader.

Medei has a history of domestic violence, according to court records.

Medei fought in fits and starts between 1981 and 2004, losing to opponents such as former middleweight titlist Doug DeWitt, former light heavyweight and cruiserweight beltholder Bobby Czyz, and contemporary cruiserweights Eliseo Castillo, Imamu Mayfield and Andre Purlette.

He left the sport with a record of 16-11-3 (10 knockouts).

6. Boxers Behaving Badly, part two: Featherweight prospect Fahsai Sakkreerin is facing fraud charges in South Africa after allegedly submitting a false medical certificate before his now-canceled bout with that country's Zolani Marali, according to the Daily Dispatch.

Sakkreerin, 27, had at first refused to undergo medical tests upon arriving in South Africa. Later, he reportedly admitted to having Hepatitis B, a viral disease spread through infected blood.

Sakkreerin has not yet been arrested or charged. He 'has taken refuge at the Thailand Embassy,' the newspaper reported.

Sakkreerin is 24-1 with 10 knockout victories. The Marali bout was to have been for the fringe International Boxing Organization 130-pound title.

7. Boxing Trainers Behaving Badly: David Curran, a boxing trainer and manager out of Australia, has been arrested and charged with killing former Australian heavyweight titlist Vince Cervi, according to Melbourne newspaper The Age.

Curran, 45, will remain behind bars until a July 14 hearing. Police say Cervi owned a property from which Curran had recently been evicted.

Cervi was 41, according to BoxRec.com, or 42, according to the newspaper. He fought 18 times as a professional, compiling a record of 11-5-2 with 8 knockout victories.

8. Boxing Journalist Behaving Badly update: A former boxing photographer accused of being a serial killer was found guilty earlier this month of killing six people and injuring 19. The penalty phase will start today (March 23), according to the Associated Press.

Dale S. Hausner, whose work occasionally ran on a well-known boxing Web site, could receive the death penalty.

Hausner was one of three men connected with a 15-month shooting spree in and around Phoenix that ended with eight people dead and left 20 more wounded. He was arrested in August 2006. The trial began last fall.

A former roommate of Hausner's pleaded guilty to two of the murders. Hausner's older brother, Jeff, allegedly played a role in the spree as well.

9. From the Department of Seemingly Random Tidbits: Hud Mellencamp, son of singer-songwriter John Mellencamp, is one win away from a regional Golden Gloves championship.

The 14-year-old boxes out of the Indianapolis Police Athletic League. He defeated fellow 132-pounder Tate Sturgeon by a 4-1 decision last week to move on to next month's Indiana Golden Gloves final. This was only Mellencamp's third amateur bout, according to the Lafayette Journal and Courier.

10. That said, I hope Mellencamp comes to the ring to the tune of 'Hurts So Good.' That is, unless his father hasn't already remade it as 'Hud's So Good'

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