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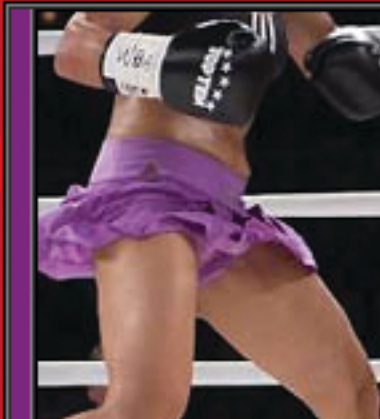
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Discovering Women's Boxing: "Here We Go Again"

By **Bernie McCoy**

October 31, 2011

Photo: uk.eurosport.com

(OCT 31) The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is located, appropriately, in the Broadcast House in Westminster, a section of London, England. London will be host to the 2012 Summer Olympics beginning July 27. During those Games, Women's boxing will debut as an Olympic sport. Those three facts coalesced last week (October 26) in the form of a 300 word article, by BBC Sport, about amateur female boxers who will be competing in 2012. It may not have been the first story this venerable news organization published on the subject, but it was the one that generated the biggest reaction with the female boxing community. The subject of the BBC article was whether Olympic women boxers should be compelled to wear skirts, in the ring, during the Games. The reaction, in the boxing community, was, predictably, "here we go again."

Here we go again with mainstream press coverage of female boxers that gets it absolutely wrong. Rather than concentrating on athletes who participate in a sport that demands an ultimate level of courage along with skill and endurance, the BBC, a bastion of journalism, hones in on a superfluous issue relating specifically to the gender of the athletes. Here we go again with off-target media coverage that wanders far from the essence of a sport and falls into pandering, parochial, pathetic views of an already often misunderstood sport while at the same time presenting readers with nothing approaching an insightful view of a sport that is an often artful, sometimes brutal exhibition of athletic prowess by world class boxers who happen to be female.

And it seems, almost from the beginning, as far as mainstream coverage of Women's boxing has been concerned, to have always been thus. I can remember watching one of the first network telecasts of female boxing in the 1970s. It was part of one of the Saturday sports anthology programs, in this case, "CBS Sports Spectacular." The announcer was Tom Brookshier, a former NFL comeback for the Philadelphia Eagles who later became the first broadcast partner of Pat Summerall on NFL telecasts. The fighters' names have disappeared into the clouds of history, but the bout was in Las Vegas and I still recall Brookshier's "opening intro" to the bout during which he fervently hoped that "neither of these girls gets hurt." And later his equally condescending comparison of the bout to a "brawl between saloon girls in a western movie."

**90 YEAR ANNIVERSARY
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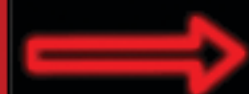
Coverage of Women's boxing did improve in subsequent decades with the arrival of the Christy Martins, the Sumya Ananis, the Laila Alis and a burgeoning, grass roots growth of amateur female boxing programs throughout the world. But always, it seemed, there were, and continue to be, far too many stories, print and broadcast, primarily from general market outlets, purportedly covering female boxing but, in reality, managing to descend into areas that should never see the light of publication. I recall Sumya Anani relating about an hour she spent with a national newspaper reporter and her reaction to later reading the story which used only one of her (Anani) quotes, a throwaway line she had, disparagingly, used about "women boxing in thongs."

I thought about Anani, who may have been the best of all professional boxers, when I was reading the BBC story. But at the same time I realized the comparison may be somewhat invalid. The BBC is a fine news organization and deserves the reputation it has earned over years of exemplary journalistic practice. The London Olympics will be a "local story" for the BBC and it's coverage of the Games will be, in all likelihood, detailed, accurate and comprehensive. The "skirts" story was but an early "toe in the water" piece about an event that is still more than half a year away. The coverage of female boxing will improve as the actual competition nears, since there are indications that the sport, when given a chance to showcase it's athletes and their talent, surprises and then impresses not only many boxing fans, but also media observers new to the sport. In fact one of the oldest and most prestigious amateur boxing tournaments in the country seems to be indicating that female boxers are, at long last, becoming an accepted part of the event.

This is the 85th year of the NY Daily News Golden Gloves. In the mid-nineties women were, after years of struggle, allowed to compete in the tournament. Each year since, the Daily News has run full page ads, inviting amateur boxers, from the New York area, to compete. The ads have always included a printed stipulation that the tournament included separate "Women's Weight Divisions." Ads for the 2012 competition began running last week and, for the first time since the mid-nineties, there was an absence of any mention of female divisions. Instead, the headline read, "Today's Boxers, Tomorrow's Champions." Women boxers are, of course, still part of the competition, but at least in these initial ads, female competitors seem to have become a "business as usual" part of the NY Daily News Golden Gloves, to the point that the tournament's administrators felt it unnecessary to mention females as a separate part of the event. They, are, rather, part of "Today's Boxers, Tomorrow's Champions."

And that's the way it should be for all female boxers: professional, amateur, Olympic, Golden Gloves, even those just starting out in the sport, learning to work a speed bag. All these women have chosen boxing as their sport and these athletes deserve to be portrayed as competitors in a very difficult sport, as athletes with varying skill levels, all of whom put in an inordinate amount of arduous training for a chance to show their skill and courage, for a few minutes, under the bright lights of a boxing ring. In a word, they are boxers, who happen to be, proudly, women. I hope that's the future media mind set that defines the coverage of female boxing, particularly in the upcoming Olympics, which will, on a world wide venue, showcase these athletes and their sport. They deserve, at long last, to have it done the right way.

Bernie McCoy



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