

Rants: Columnist treated poorly at De La Hoya-Hopkins contest

This is my chosen profession.

After finishing with bachelor of science degree in microbiology, the last thing on my mind was a career in journalism. At the time Black scientists were few and racism existed but not as prevalent.

A chance meeting at a tennis tournament with San Francisco Sun-Reporter sports editor Sam Skinner Jr., now departed, brought about my initial introduction into sports writing.

Skinner, noting my interest in tennis but also knowing my astute awareness of basketball, football, baseball and boxing, appointed me his assistant sports editor. I had participated in the four sports in high school and college before our meeting.

Together, Skinner and I were off and running to many athletic events. He was one of the pioneers of Black sports writers in this country and wanted someone to help him pave the way. For his path finding, he has been inducted into the National Black Journalist Hall of Fame as a pioneer. That is the result. Much happened before.

Meanwhile, Skinner was proselytizing his friend the research assistant.

Giving up on the laboratory, I eventually applied for a job as cityside reporter under San Francisco Chronicle city editor Abe Mellinkoff and left the Sun-Reporter and sports. For reasons known only to Skinner and the owner of the Sun-Reporter, they parted and I was asked to return to the paper and became the sports editor more than a quarter of a century ago.

Doing sports for another publication didn't interfere with cityside, so Mellinkoff didn't mind. The Chronicle sports section was filled, so I finally left to continue sports at the Sun-Reporter. It was a move some questioned, but I liked the sports beat most, and there weren't any threats on your life from athletes when you wrote about their triumphs or failures.

Sun-Reporter owner, Dr. Carlton Goodlett, now deceased, was friends with promoter Don King, who was putting on the Larry Holmes-Ken Norton title fight at Caesars Palace, and sent his sports editor to cover the bout in 1978.

King's public relations director was Andrew Hatcher, former public relations man for President Lyndon B. Johnson. When I arrived at the site of the fight, I was given royal treatment by Katherine X, Hatcher's assistant. Thus began my first sojourn to Las Vegas, which had become the center of boxing in the United States.

Since that championship bout, this reporter has given extensive coverage to a large number of fights in Las Vegas for the Sun-Reporter, Lincoln Echo, Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice, Los Angeles Sentinel and radio station KLAV 1230 AM.

However, last week when the media credentials to the Bernard Hopkins-Oscar De La Hoya fight were first distributed, this columnist, sports editor, and radio host was given a Media Center only credential.

He was informed that there were going to be more than 200 members of the press who were going to watch the fight on television in the media center and there wasn't a spot for him in the arena.



SPORTS PACE

By Huel Washington

When he told promoter Bob Arum what had happened, Arum said he could not do anything about

the situation. Very strange that the promoter wouldn't remedy the dilemma.

Meanwhile, Lee Samuels, head of publicity for Arum, went over to Amy Zopfi's office and the Sun-Reporter's sports editor was given a seat between Budd Shulberg and Norm Clarke of "Vegas Confidential."

When discussing the situation about the lack of African-American media covering this fight, Scott Gertner, public relations person for MGM Mirage, said the assignments weren't based on race.

Well, they should have been. Whether the promoters and public relations people like it or not, race is involved in sports all the way from the promoters, players, coaches and to media.

Just looking around the media center, the amount of African-American media covering Hopkins and De La Hoya were very few. Hispanics were there and so were Whites. The only writers with Black media ties were Ken Miller of the Los Angeles Sentinel and me, representing the San Francisco Sun-Reporter.

Also, there were Tim Smith, an African-American who writes for the New York Post, and Lee Satterfield, a sports writer for the Baltimore Sun. These are both large metropolitan dailies. African-American television sportscasters included Jim Hill of Los Angeles and Dennis Evans of Las Vegas Channel 13.

According to Gertner, there were more than 800 requests for credentials for this fight and the African-Americans weren't singled out to be in the media center.

Someone is missing the boat about media racism in communications. African-Americans have a tendency to read their publications like Jet, Ebony, the Sun-Reporter and the Sentinel-Voice more than the dailies because there aren't many good stories about their race in the regular news.

Keep our people informed, that's what was done when I was cityside at the Chronicle. I wrote stories that Blacks would read. Look at baseball and Barry Bonds. How many of those reporters saying the derogatory remarks about his career are African-Americans? Probably none.

That's why he is so hard on the media. Not enough brothers asking questions. Remember Nolan Richardson's statement. Not enough look like me. The media needs brothers and sisters, especially writers.

A White reporter from Philadelphia denigrated Mike Tyson, who came to the post-fight press conference. "He hasn't worked out since 1988," he yelled.

"That's a lie," I said. "I personally saw him working out at Golden Glove Gym with Freddie Roach." The writer didn't say another word. But that's how the negatives get out.

Both Smith of the Post and Satterfield of the Sun picked Hopkins to win by decision. The Sun-Reporter, although not asked by the local media, said Hopkins was the bigger one and usually the bigger fighter wins. Hopkins came down in weight to 156 and De La Hoya was coming up at 155 pounds.

S P O R T S

Hopkins

(Continued from Page 1) light heavyweight champion Antonio Tarver or Roy Jones Jr. in another huge money bout.

"Money you can make and money you can lose," Hopkins said. "But history you can never erase. That's important to Bernard Hopkins to go down in history and be talked about like Ray Robinson is talked about now."

Hopkins, who was criticized for not capitalizing on his knockout of Felix Trinidad three years ago, doesn't plan to make the same mistake again after suddenly stopping De La Hoya in a tactical fight that really didn't live up to its advance billing.

Both Hopkins and De La Hoya fought cautiously the first half of the fight before Hopkins began taking control in the seventh and eighth rounds behind his jab. De La Hoya was losing but still competitive before a devastating left hook to his liver left him writhing on the canvas in pain.

"It paralyzes you. You can't do anything about it, and you lose your breath," De La Hoya said. "I've never experienced that in my career. You're stuck. It's like you want to get up but you can't."

De La Hoya went down on his elbows and knees, his face contorted in pain before rolling over on his back as

referee Kenny Bayless waved the fight to a close at 1:38 of the ninth round.

While Hopkins jumped on the ring posts and then did a flip in celebration, De La Hoya got back on his knees and buried his face in his gloves, pounding the canvas repeatedly in frustration at an opportunity lost.

"I feel proud but obviously very disappointed," De La Hoya said. "But I don't regret it at all. I'm actually very

"I'll be 40 in January, I need big fights."

— Bernard Hopkins

grateful I had an opportunity to make history with Hopkins."

De La Hoya was a 2-1 underdog, and acknowledged that perhaps he had set his sights too high by moving up to middleweight to challenge a fighter who hadn't lost in so long that he didn't remember what it was like to lose.

It was the second loss in his last three fights for De La Hoya and some think he lost the other one in June when he barely beat little known Felix Sturm in his first fight as a middleweight.

De La Hoya is boxing's biggest attraction, as evidenced by the crowd of

16,112 that filled the MGM Grand arena and the huge pay-per-view business that was expected to make the fight the richest non-heavyweight fight ever.

But whether he can continue to get people to pay while he loses fights and looks increasingly mediocre — assuming he continues to fight — remains to be seen.

"I know I can be better," De La Hoya said. "I know I can step it up a few more notches."

Hopkins, meanwhile, is still chasing a fight with Jones, the last fighter to beat him 11 years ago. There's also the possibility he could move up in weight to challenge Tarver, but for now Hopkins wants to make his 20th title defense before exploring his other options.

"I'll be 40 in January," Hopkins said. "I need big fights." Hopkins was exuberant yet gracious after the fight, answering questions thoughtfully and inviting anyone who wanted to ask even more. He was enjoying the spotlight, enjoying his chance to shine on a stage like he had never been on before.

"I said I would be the first to knock out De La Hoya and that was very important to me," he said. "Two of the best fighters of the era, De La Hoya and Trinidad, I have knockouts over both of them. You couldn't ask for a better script."

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