

Saccurato/Rakoczy: One Thing Missing
By Bernie McCoy



On September 27, at the Tachi Palace Hotel and Casino in Lemoore, CA, Ann Marie Saccurato KO'd Jessica Rakoczy, taking Rakoczy's WBC lightweight title. The knockout came two seconds before the final bell and ended a bout that was described, in one ringside observation, as "one of the best female fights ever seen." Another veteran boxing observer, taking a more tempered view, told me that the bout "was the most grueling female fight I've ever seen, both fighters were really beat up at the end." Grueling, in the lexicon of the ring, directly translates to high praise, coming, in this case, from a "boxing guy" who has seen the sport from almost every conceivable angle.

Neither Saccurato or Rakoczy are, in any sense of the term, classic boxers. Both fighters have earned their high ranking and respect in the sport the old fashioned way; they earned it with a straight forward, take-a-punch-to-land-a-punch style. This crowd-pleasing boxing was on full display in the highlight tape available on "myspace.com" (Click here: Saccurato Rakoczy 9.27.07) both fighters going all out for ten rounds, taking turns forcing the action. It was a very good female bout, maybe not the "best ever" but one that was certainly deserving of the "grueling" plaudit. The ten rounds had bell-bell action, it had well matched, quality fighters, it had a dramatic, sudden ending. What it didn't have was television coverage. The fact is that this ten rounds of boxing, whether adjudged one of the "best ever" female bouts or ten great rounds of grueling action was held in relative obscurity in front of a few thousand boxing fans in a casino in California. And that's too bad; it's too bad these fighters and this fight weren't accorded the type of coverage, the type of national coverage, a bout like this and fighters like Ann Marie Saccurato and Jessica Rakoczy, and the way they honored their sport, deserved.

Who's to blame? No one, if you listen to all those currently steering the sport from what seems to be the "back seat" of the vehicle called Women's boxing. Who's to blame? Everyone, if you take an objective view of the sport and pose the question why athletes like Saccurato and Rakoczy and so many others with names like Hernandez, Garside, McCarter, Fiorentino, Ashley, and Moreno (who was on a companion bout in Lemoore) to mention just several, fight, in near secrecy, without the benefit of any semblance of national exposure, in proportion to their outsized boxing talent.

It requires very little time and effort to list the few and far between "live" televised female boxing bouts broadcast in the past several years by the so-called "boxing networks." It takes even less time to list the quality female bouts, those bouts featuring two good women fighters or even those bouts that were featured attractions on the networks that purport to cover the sport of boxing. HBO has never broadcast a female bout on their cable outlet, Showtime has not covered a major female bout in this century, ESPN, in recent months, seems to have adopted an "oh, by the way, here's a female boxing bout" attitude, solely designed to fill remaining time on a two hour weekly broadcast. Thus, television and those networks, purporting to cover boxing, deserve a major share of blame for their benign neglect of a sport that has the capability of staging a Saccurato/Rakoczy bout. Instead these networks provide their viewers with an expanse of overexposure of a "sport" that features layabouts sitting, for days, around a card table or a competition, in a cage, featuring combatants in bicycle shorts, combining aspects of barroom brawling and professional wrestling.

The efforts by those in the sport of Women's boxing to break through the TV wall have been, at times, valiant, but, have, thus far, come up far short. Arnie Rosenthal made the biggest and best publicized push with his "A Ring of Their Own" series, featuring well matched, competitive, quality, all-female boxing programs. As good as the bouts, the presentation and the quality of the cards and the boxers were, the AROTO program was not provided sustained "live" TV time slots. Even an AROTO PPV show was broadcast on a delayed basis. Rick Kulis, one of the true innovators, as far as television coverage of the sport, achieved, earlier this year, a breakthrough with "live" female boxing programs on Fox Sports network. But, unfortunately the time slots on Fox, in half the TV homes, often extended into hours more compatible with selling "Dean Martin roast" tapes than a card of female boxing bouts.

Now it's entirely fair to categorize the above screed against the television medium as little more than a "blinding flash of the obvious." But the fact remains that unless and until the sport of Women's boxing achieves sustaining TV coverage of the best fighters in the sport competing against each other, the state of malaise, currently shrouding Women's boxing and impeding it's growth, will continue. TV embraced female boxing during it's burst on the sports landscape at a time when Christy Martin and Lucia Rijker reigned atop the sport. Those days are gone and they're not coming back. But as Saccurato/Rakoczy proved there is still much of the sport for television to embrace. What will it take? A good start would be an effort on the part of those in the best position to make a resurgence happen. Who? Promoters attuned to the sport, the Christian Printups, the Len Fresquezes, the Jimmy Burchfields; those businessmen who have already proven, with local shows, that the sport of Women's boxing can be successful. These promoters need to start thinking beyond their current geographical limitations and the next time they construct a boxing card they need to make national TV an integral part of the package. These smart guys, these smart boxing guys, need to push the networks, and push them hard, for coverage of their boxing cards in Lemoore, Albuquerque and Providence. At the same time, and, ideally, in conjunction with that trio of promoters, Arnie Rosenthal, who knows the twists and turns of the broadcast corridors as well as anyone in the sport, needs to take another shot at launching a continuing program of Women's boxing on "live" television.

Easy? Not a chance! If such a construct was easy, the fans of Women's boxing would be watching regular coverage of the sport. Ann Marie Saccurato and Jessica Rakoczy would have gotten the electronic exposure they deserved. No, this is a huge hill for the sport of Women's boxing to climb. But make no mistake, if television coverage doesn't become an integral part of the sport, then, while Women's boxing continues to meander through the forest of niche sports, it will wend a path towards irrelevancy. It's television that is missing from the sport of Women's boxing. It's television that was missing from those ten rounds in Lemoore. And if that situation continues, it will be the sport of Women's boxing that