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**THE WEIGH
AHEAD**

Is Marquez right about
the '10lbs' rule?

AUGUST 8 2013

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uan Manuel Marquez, an accountant as well as a boxer, made a good mathematical point when he argued that he and opponent Timothy Bradley should not be permitted to add more than 10lbs to

their welterweight bodies between weigh-in and fight. While contracts are already signed for the October 12 meeting and it is doubtful that Bradley will concede the point, Marquez raises a persistent issue in a sport where fairness and safety depend on two fighters being the same size.

Boxing, like other combat sports, finds structure in its weight divisions, from straw-weight to heavyweight. The recognition that a 135lbs lightweight should not be fighting a 175lbs light-heavyweight is rooted in common sense, a realisation that size does matter inside the ropes. It may not be all that matters – skill, speed, experience, intelligence and mental fortitude all play their part – but it is the factor that can be most easily quantified and that forms the foundation for a fair fight. Whether you long for the days of the eight weight divisions, or have come to accept the 17 weight classes that produce so many champions, the basic premise that weight matters has not changed. It follows that the powers that regulate the sport should work to ensure that the two fighters getting ready to do battle should enter the ring at roughly the same weight.

Unfortunately, the alphabet sanctioning bodies and local boxing commissions have offered too many different versions of rules regarding a fighter's weight and the timing and frequency of weigh-ins. It is a problem that infects all of boxing – too many sanctioning organisations, too many local commissions, too many divergent rules and practices. The WBO, which has sanctioned the bout between title-holder Bradley and challenger Marquez, provides in its rules for an official weigh-in but surprisingly offers no guidance as to when the weigh-in should take place. The other organisations do set parameters. The WBA mandates that the weigh-in take place between 16 and 36 hours before the sanctioned bout. The WBC calls for the weigh-in to take place no less than 24 hours and no more than 30 hours prior to the bout "due to the possible adverse results of dehydration and subsequent rehydration of boxers to make the required weight limit for a bout," and in addition prescribes "safety weigh-ins" 30 days and seven days before the bout.

And the IBF schedules the official weigh-in no less than 20 and no more than 30 hours before the scheduled opener on the fight card, as well as a second weigh-in on the morning of the event at which the fighters cannot weigh more than 10lbs over the weight limit.

While the WBC's day-before rule may sound good on the surface, the stated rationale – that boxers need time to properly rehydrate – assumes that they have become improperly dehydrated prior to the weigh-in. Greg Sirb, long-time Executive Director of the Pennsylvania State Athletic Commission and a vocal advocate for day-of-the-fight weigh-ins, said it best: "If a fighter has to starve himself and dehydrate himself in order to make weight, that is a sign that the fighter should not be in that weight class." Starvation and dehydration, needless to say, cannot be good for the body, yet that is exactly what is promoted by day-before weigh-ins. Sirb practices what he preaches, holding weigh-ins in

his state on the morning of the fight (though even he is forced to make an exception when a title fight comes to town).

Larry Merchant, a boxing authority who has spent a lifetime speaking about the sport in print and on air, agrees with Sirb. "The scientific or medical argument for early weigh-ins has largely been discounted. If it doesn't make fighting safer, then on an observational basis it makes boxing less safe." That is because it allows a naturally bigger man to put on as much as 20lbs between weigh-in and fight, and thereby gain an unfair advantage in size and strength over a smaller opponent.

Marquez's call for a second weigh-in on the day of the fight is a step in the right direction, and essentially mirrors the IBF rule, which prohibits a fighter from weighing more than 10lbs over the weight limit on the morning of the fight. While the WBO does not have such a rule (or any rule other than that an official weigh-in be held), Marquez argues that since he is willing to participate in PED testing even though such testing is not part of the rules, Bradley should be willing to participate in a day-of-the-fight weigh-in.

Sometimes boxers are forced to lead because

the sanctioning and regulatory bodies in the sport fail to take action. Credit Floyd Mayweather, not just the best boxer of his time but a powerbroker in the sport, for insisting on drug testing in his fights. He showed himself a pioneer when boxing commissions and sanctioning bodies failed to properly address the rampant use of PEDs. And credit Marquez for highlighting another important issue in boxing: that day-before weigh-ins allow boxers to fight in weight classes where they do not belong. While it is natural that Marquez, like any fighter, will look for every possible edge, physical and psychological, to improve his chance of victory in the ring, sanctioning bodies and boxing commissions, charged with the duty to regulate the sport and to ensure fairness, should nevertheless pay heed to his call.

What is needed is a new look at the rules regarding weigh-ins. For the better part of the 20th century, weigh-ins took place on the day of the fight. I believe that practice changed for the wrong reasons – reasons that have to do with the promotion of the fight rather than the health and safety of fighters. As stated simply by Merchant, "Promoters use weigh-ins as a way of marketing their fighters." Holding the weigh-in on the day before the fight provides another opportunity for publicity and television exposure. It is part of the hype leading to a fight, hype that sells tickets and attracts television viewers. Promoters and television executives are not wrong to want this publicity, but finally it must take a back seat to the more important considerations of safety and fairness. It is those interests that sanctioning organisations and local commissions must protect.

Holding the weigh-in on the day of the fight, as Pennsylvania does, encourages fighters to make weight in the proper way, and to fight in their proper weight classes. "What's more important?" asks Sirb. "What the kid weighs before the fight or what he weighs at competition?" And that, finally, is the point. The reason that weight classes exist at all is to ensure a fair fight. Fair and safe competition begins with the requirement that the two men facing each other are the same size. If that is the goal, as it must be, then the way to achieve that goal is by holding day-of-the-fight weigh-ins. The sanctioning organisations and boxing commissions should work together to create a single, consistent rule in order to make the sport fairer and safer.

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