

East Coast Notebook: The MSG Squared Circle is retired

By **David Kolb** (Sept 19, 2007)

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Today, Madison Square Garden will officially retire their boxing ring, a ring that has hosted more championship bouts than any other boxing ring in existence.

The question is why now?

One reason may be that the old ring just can't hold up anymore, especially with three heavyweight fights coming to MSG in one night on October 6.

Heavyweights DaVarryl Williamson and Jameel McCline were just added to the undercard for the Oleg Maskaev-Sam Peter championship scrap, while Andrew Golata and Kevin McBride will also duke it out in what figures to be an entertaining, if comical, bout.

The Williamson-McCline bout was made after Vitali Klitschko pulled out of his scheduled match against McCline on Sept. 22 in Munich, Germany due to a back injury that required surgery.

According to Don King Promotions, this now marks the fifth straight time that Vitali has pulled out of a scheduled fight.

"Williamson versus McCline is a fight made by Vitali Klitschko," said King.

"Vitali's people couldn't come to terms with me for Williamson, and Vitali himself did what he usually does, he backed out of a fight, this time with McCline. Now I've brought Williamson and McCline together to prove they are worthy of a world title shot."

Easy Don, I don't know if either of these guys are worthy of any such a shot!

Meanwhile, the 6-foot 4-inch Williamson, ranked No. 4 by the WBA, will battle the 6-foot-6-inch "Big Time" McCline in a battle of big, tall heavyweights, and there will plenty of people hoping to hear some big thudding on MSG's new canvas.

Williamson interestingly sparred with Vitali the day before he pulled out of the fight with McCline.

"I don't know what they (the Klitschko camp) anticipated from me (in sparring) but I will tell you they got their money's worth. I sparred with Vitali on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday (Sept. 4, 6 and 7) and didn't notice anything unusual," Williamson said. "I didn't know anything about his injury, which they said happened the next day on Saturday (Sept. 8). I don't know what happened between Friday and Saturday morning."

No matter, because Williamson has now become a participant and not a mere sparring partner.

McCline said, "I am very disappointed that the fight with Vitali is not happening on Sept. 22, but I promise that whenever and if ever he steps into the ring with me I will put him on his now supposedly surgically repaired back."

"Now that Vitali's backed out, DaVarryl Williamson has stepped up and he's getting knocked out. There is no way I'm going to be denied on Oct. 6."

Big words for a guy that was knocked out by Nikolai Valuev in three and decisioned by Zuri Lawrence, Calvin Brock and Chris Byrd over the past few years, wouldn't you say?

The biggest question surrounding this story is: Will Vitali ever fight again?

My guess is, No!

Getting back to where I started, after the MSG's ring retirement, the ring will be donated to the International Boxing Hall of Fame in Canastota, New York. The ring will be displayed in the Amphitheater, where boxing fans will have the opportunity to learn of its legendary past.

Many past champions that have fought in MSG's ring will be at the ceremony, including:

Joe Frazier, Bernard Hopkins, Emile Griffith, Buddy McGirt, Vito Antuofermo, Iran Barkley, Mark Breland, Joey Giardello, Virgil Hill, Junior Jones, Juan LaPorte, Carlos Ortiz and Marlon Starling.



TITO-ROY???

Something tells me that the Tito Trinidad-Roy Jones fight won't happen. No announcement has come yet in terms of a date, location or TV – and it doesn't look as if there is much interest from HBO or Showtime. Word is that this fight is to take place January 19 at MSG, but no formal announcement is even close to being made.

MCGIRT OVERLOAD

Maybe it's just me, but at what point does Buddy McGirt have too much on his plate?

He is currently training a bunch of fighters including Paulie Malignaggi, Frankie Figueroa, Tomasz Adamek, Lamon Brewster, Vernon Forrest and of course his son James McGirt Jr. while training half the fighters on the ESPN show, The Contender.

Then comes this news release: *Please find a new Team McBride media release about Irish heavyweight champion Kevin McBride training for his Oct. 6th fight against Andrew Golota in NYC with new trainer Buddy McGirt in Vero Beach, Florida.*

C'mon Buddy, its quality, not quantity!

POPCORN AND PUGILISTS

This past Tuesday night at the Downtown Association in New York City, Fighting Irishmen held a unique event celebrating boxing on the silver screen. Movies have been an important part of boxing history and so Jim Houlihan, the curator of the Fighting Irishmen exhibit presently at the South Street Seaport, joined by boxing historian Steve Lott, put together a special evening entitled *Popcorn and Pugilists*.

Classics such as "On the Waterfront," "Requiem for A Heavyweight," "Raging Bull, the Rocky classics, and more recently "Million Dollar Baby" and "Cinderella Man, have portrayed boxing on the big screen.

Tony LoBianco, who portrayed Rocky Marciano in the film *Marciano*; Maureen Shea, the undefeated female fighter who prepped Hilary Swank for *Million Dollar Baby*; and "Irish" Micky Ward, whose life will be profiled in a film currently in production starring Matt Damon and Mark Wahlberg, were all in attendance. Snippets from many boxing flicks were shown throughout the forum.

Boxers who have appeared in movies through the years include, Muhammad Ali, Ray Robinson, Jack Dempsey, Joe Louis, Gene Tunney, Jack Johnson, Benny Leonard, James J. Corbett, Jersey Joe Walcott, Primo Carnera and Max Baer.

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