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Pugilistic Arts Saved By "Not So Foxy Boxing"

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA- The grand sport of boxing is, in the very truest and most cliched sense of the term, on the ropes. As the once plentiful population of tiny cigar-champing men slowly dwindles, boxing promoters have had to come to grips with the notion that the time-honored sport of beating someone into brain death for cash may soon be a relic of the past. But don't write off the sweet science too quickly. Next week, Fox Television will air a sanctioned boxing match between Tanya Harding and Paula Jones as a part of its new <I>Celebrity Boxing</I> series.

Fox Network spokesman Joe Earley explained the show's potential appeal. "It's kind of like 'foxy boxing' but with far less attractive women," said Earley. "The great thing about Harding and Jones is that they not only appeal to the network's target demographic, they <I>are</I> the target demographic. If Tanya Harding weren't in the ring, you just know she'd be watching at home."

Network executives say the show is the kind of thing people have been seeing on daytime television for years, like <I>Jerry Springer</I> with a bit of star power. And it may be just the shot in the arm boxing needs.

Boxing fans also hope that the association with Fox Television will lend a measure of credibility to the sport. The prestige of a network like Fox could very likely return boxing to a level of respectability.

"Fox is helped by Don King. Boxing is helped by shows like <I>Craziest Police Crashes 5</I>. It's a win-win," said Earley.

The lineup for the fight continues to change as borderline celebrities sober up enough to bow out. Amy Fisher had originally signed on to fight Harding, but reportedly after the Niquil and Stoli wore off the idea didn't have the same appeal. There are even rumors of a Todd Bridges vs. Vanilla Ice bout as an undercard. Collectors of the macabre are holding their collective breath for a <I>Behind The Music/True Hollywood Story/Celebrity Boxing</I> triple DVD set.

We asked Earley why Fox chose these particular celebrities for the show's first episode. "Because we knew they weren't doing anything and because they would do anything we asked to be on TV again," he said.

Since many of the celebrities involved have only been seen on surveillance tapes in recent years [a few even made appearances on Fox's <I>America's Dumbest Criminals</I>], the bouts will be shot with security cameras.

As expected the event has raised quite a bit of interest in the sport of boxing. Publicity about the bouts seems to have made fight fans of nearly everyone. One interested viewer put it this way: "If Tanya Harding wins, Paula Jones gets her ass kicked. If Jones wins, Harding gets her ass kicked. I hate them all, so I'm a winner either way."

Sure, you say, <I>Celebrity Boxing</I> will bring new fans to boxing, but won't it hurt the sport if the fights are fixed? Earley says the bouts will be perfectly legitimate- as "real" as any sanctioned boxing match.

Fox has already anticipated the success of the show and is already working on a new program for sweeps. Combining the American love of bloodsport with the abundance of available low-level celebrities, producers are working on a program in which contestants compete in gladiatorial combat and bear bating- all for grain alcohol and cigarettes. The as-yet untitled program should hit the air in mid-May.