



DENNIS G. HENDRICKS

FIGHT NIGHT: Guillermo Saputo, left, won the welterweight title last May, beating San Jose native Jesse Martinez.

San Jose boxing matches pack the punch to lure HBO

BY ANDREW F. HAMM
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Cable TV channel HBO Latino has signed a 12-fight deal with the promoters of Fight Night at the Tank that will broadcast at least one boxing match from San Jose's Compaq Center in 2003.

Golden Boy Promotions president Roy Englebrecht says the contract will allow higher-profile boxers to appear on the ticket in future fights. The bouts will be shown on a regular Thursday night schedule and will not be pay-per-view.

HBO officials would not comment on the deal, although a source there confirmed that a contract has been signed. Neither side would reveal details, including the dollar value of the deal.

Silicon Valley Sports & Entertainment, which runs Compaq Center, has given the go-ahead for the second season of Fight Night at the Tank and is looking for additional bouts. Promoter Peter Howes has been hired by Silicon Valley Sports & Entertainment to bring in bigger fights in addition to Golden Boy Promotions' series, says Steve Kirsner, director of booking and events.

Mr. Howes is credited with reviving boxing in the Bay Area last year when he brought the super featherweight title fight between Floyd "Pretty Boy" Mayweather and Jesus Chavez to the San Francisco Civic Center. That November bout was the first Bay Area world title fight in 40 years.

"Pete is here to talk us up to the boxing community to let them know that we are here and interested," Mr. Kirsner says.

Mr. Howes says he was looking to bring boxing matches to Compaq Center even before teaming up with Silicon Valley Sports & Entertainment.

"Because of Compaq Center, which is a beautiful facility, I always thought San Jose was a prime market for boxing matches," he says. "We want to bring championship matches here."

For the Fight Night II series, promoters are counting on the drawing power of two championship fights, albeit for California state titles instead of world titles. One of those, the California state women's featherweight championship, was sanctioned only after Golden Boy Promotions president Mr. Englebrecht asked the California Boxing Commission to create the title.

"There's something about someone entering the ring with a belt hanging over his head that really makes the moment," Mr. Englebrecht says.

Golden Boy Promotions is using HBO's pull — and income stream — to bring in more recognizable fighters, he says. "HBO Latino will ratchet up the interest, definitely," says Mr. Englebrecht.

Even without the help of HBO, attendance at the inaugural Fight Night on May 23 was 4,127 spectators, about twice the initial estimates.

HBO Latino is one of seven channels HBO offers and is available in about 50 percent of homes that carry HBO. AT&T Broadband, which covers most of Silicon Valley, carries HBO Latino as part of its HBO package.

Besides San Jose, HBO Latino will show Golden Boy Promotions fights originating in Bakersfield, Irvine, Portland, Ore., and Tallahassee, Fla. No dates have been set, Mr. Englebrecht says. Golden Boy Promotions is expected to use the HBO contract to entice arena operators elsewhere to sign on.

The company brings in mostly local and unknown fighters vying for modest prizes and a chance to gain the eye of the boxing crowd. Former welterweight title holder Oscar De La Hoya owns Golden Boy Promotions and has made several appearances in San Jose to promote the May 23 boxing event.

Tickets for the boxing matches range from \$20 to \$85.

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