

Wilder, Fury promise decision in rematch

The unbeaten heavyweight fighters say second meeting won't be a draw.

By MANOUK AKOPYAN

Deontay Wilder and Tyson Fury put the long-lagging heavyweight division back on the map last December when they fought to a disputed draw at Staples Center.

The undefeated fighters spent this year winning a pair of bouts as they paved a path to meet again. In the interim, Anthony Joshua and Andy Ruiz entered the heavyweight picture and created further chaos in the sport's glamour division, with Joshua righting his wrong from June by avenging this month his lone loss to Ruiz to regain four versions of the heavyweight title.

Another division-defining rematch is in store Feb. 22 as Wilder (42-0-1, 41 KOs), the World Boxing Council heavyweight champion, will take on Fury (29-0-1, 20 KOs), the lineal champion, in a rematch at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas. For the first time, a boxing match will be a joint pay-per-view on Fox and ESPN Plus.

"I'm happy and excited that the rematch is finally happening," Wilder said. "I proved myself the first time and I'm ready to do it again. It was a very controversial fight. I promise my fans that there won't be any controversy with this one. I'm going to finish it."



MARK J. TERRILL/Associated Press

DEONTAY WILDER, right, connects with Tyson Fury in their first heavyweight title bout last December.

Said Fury: "There's no more ducking and diving. The date has been set, and the 'Bomb Squad' is about to be securely detonated and the real champion crowned as the world watches on for the most anticipated fight in years. This unfinished business for me, but come Feb. 22, this dossier will finally get what's coming to him, and I can't wait."

The particulars announced Thursday for the encore showing are no surprise.

Fury originally announced the date in August on ESPN programming while they each still had unfinished business in front of them.

Wilder, a 34-year-old Alabamian and 2008 Olympic bronze medalist, arguably faced tough opponents en route to the rematch, yet still scored two knockouts, against Dominic Breazeale in May and Luis Ortiz in November.

The 38-year-old British Fury, who signed a \$100-mil-

lion deal with Top Rank in February to further build his U.S. profile, faced unheralded fighters with Tom Schwarz in June, disposing of him in two rounds with a technical knockout.

His September fight against Otto Wallin was surprisingly more challenging, as Fury fought through a nasty gash over his right eye that required nearly four dozen stitches en route to a unanimous decision win.

The severity of the injury

led to questions whether the cut could heal in due time, or create a postponement.

As Fury recovered with a sabbatical in WWE, he went off script and shook up his corner this month, amicably parting ways with trainer Ben Davison. Fury assigned coaching duties to Javan "Sugar" Hill Steward instead, a nephew and disciple of the late great trainer Emanuel Steward.

The 27-year-old Davison was responsible for Fury's mi-

raculous comeback after a 2½-year spiral away from boxing once he beat Wladimir Klitschko in 2015. Fury ballooned to 400 pounds and battled drugs, alcohol and depression that led to a suicide attempt before bouncing back and returning to the ring in 2018.

After two tuneups, Fury faced Wilder and outboxed him the entire fight, out-punching him 84-71. Wilder, however, scored a knockdown in the ninth and 12th rounds to rally on the scorecards and secure a draw. Fury survived the last knockdown in miraculous fashion, lifting himself off the canvas to finish the fight.

Longtime rivals Bob Arum, head of Top Rank, and Al Haymon, head of PBC, are doing business together after years of stalemates pitting their best fighters against each other.

They'll have the megaphones of ESPN and Fox, the latter of which will broadcast the Super Bowl on Feb. 2, to promote the rematch.

Arum, Fury's promoter, is anticipating over 2 million pay-per-view purchases and \$100 million in revenue for the rematch, which would make the rematch one of the most successful and lucrative heavyweight fights of all time, next to the Mike Tyson versus Lennox Lewis fight in 2002 (\$110 million; 1.97 million buys), and the 1997 rematch between Tyson and Evander Holyfield at (\$100 million; 1.99 million buys).

The first fight between Wilder and Fury generated approximately 325,000 pay-per-view buys on Showtime.



SHOTGUN SPRATLING/For The Times

JUSTIN PINKNEY and his teammates will play at Nevada Las Vegas despite a coaching change.

HIGH SCHOOL RECRUITING

Serra trio will stick together at UNLV

By SHOTGUN SPRATLING

The Gardena Serra trio of quarterback Doug Brumfield, receiver Ronald Gilliam and defensive back Justin Pinkney had it mapped out. They came to separate decisions to continue being a collective. Each committed to continue their football career playing for coach Tony Sanchez at Nevada Las Vegas during five weeks early in the summer.

"We have all been together since we were little, so I was like it would be a good connection if we all went there together and stuff like that and played as a team like in high school," Pinkney said.

But Sanchez was fired in late November, leaving uncertainty for all the prospects committed to UNLV. Oregon offensive coordinator Marcus Arroyo was hired as the Rebels new coach about two weeks later. He had less than a week to solidify a recruiting class before the early signing period began.

Arroyo didn't rush to evaluate all the committed prospects and try to put on a full-court press for some recruits who were high on the previous coaching staff's recruiting board. He chose a different path.

"The new head coach, he didn't allow none of us to sign early," Pinkney said. "He said he wants to see all of us in person, like on our visit and everything."

Arroyo didn't pull any offers or renege on scholarships with any of those who committed, but he hit the pause button. He is remaining with Oregon through the Rose Bowl. UNLV didn't sign anyone in the early period, shifting the focus to the signing period that begins in February.

The news caught many of the Rebels' commits off guard, including the three Cavaliers.

"When he told me, I was like, 'Why?' But he explained it to me," Gilliam said. "I get what he's saying, so I was like I'd rather meet him first before signing, so I can get to know him more."

Pinkney had planned to take his official visit on the final weekend before the early signing period, sign Dec. 18 and enroll in January.

"I was curious. I was iffy about it because I wasn't sure what was going on," the 5-foot-11, 170-pound cornerback said. "They weren't really telling me things with everything that was going on, but when [Arroyo] called me himself and told me, I felt more confident about the commitment. He said he wanted to get the Rose Bowl out of the way first and then have us come up for a visit."

Pinkney and Gilliam said they intend to stick to the plan after speaking with Arroyo. Brumfield told the Las Vegas Review-Journal that he "can't wait" to get to UNLV and "hopefully make an immediate impact." The Serra trio plan to sign in February.

Excited about the offense

Oregon extended a scholarship offer to Gilliam the summer before his junior year, so he has some previous experience with Arroyo. He met and talked with Arroyo in the past and has paid attention to how the Ducks' offense has performed, including being No. 15 in the nation averaging 35.9 points per game this year.

"I was happy [to hear Arroyo was hired] because I like how he runs his offense," Gilliam said. "He had Oregon over there looking good, so I was excited. I already knew he was going to come with some real stuff. I think my future is bright going in."

Early opportunity

UNLV had five senior and six junior defensive backs on its roster this season. The Rebels return only two starters in the defensive backfield and both will be juniors next season.

"That'll give me a chance to go and play and start early," Pinkney said. "When they told me all the seniors are leaving, that gave me a goal, like, oh, yeah, I should commit there and stick with them."

THE DAY IN SPORTS

Ibrahimovic to rejoin AC Milan in Italy

STAFF AND WIRE REPORTS

Zlatan Ibrahimovic is returning to help struggling former Italian club AC Milan, which is reeling from a defeat and languishing way behind city rival Inter Milan.

"I'm coming back to a club I hugely respect and to the city of Milan I love," Ibrahimovic said.

The 38-year-old agreed to a deal until the end of the season with the option to extend the contract for another season, the club announced Friday.

Ibrahimovic, who had 53 goals for the Galaxy the last two seasons in Major League Soccer, played his last game for them Oct. 25, scoring in a 5-3 playoff loss to LAFC.

Ibrahimovic's arrival resembles a rescue mission for a seven-time European champion fallen on tough times. Milan is mired in 11th place in Serie A, a distant 21 points behind league leader Inter, and none of its players has more than four league goals this season. Milan hit a low Sunday with its heaviest league defeat in 21 years, 5-0 at Atlanta.

The club needs Ibrahimovic at his best to have a chance at qualifying for a European place next season.

"I'll fight together with my teammates to change the course of this season," he said. "I will do everything to make it happen."

Ibrahimovic scored 43 goals with Milan from 2010 to 2012. He has been named the best player in Serie A three times and best foreign player in Italy five times.

Twenty-two of the 23 players who played on last summer's Women's World Cup champion U.S. team were called up for training camp in preparation for next month's Olympic qualifying. The only World Cup veteran left off the roster is **Alex Morgan**, who is pregnant.

Morgan, who is expected to give birth to her first child in April, hopes to be back to play in Tokyo this summer. The U.S. is seeking to become the first team, male or female, to win a World Cup and an Olympic title in consecutive calendar years.

In addition to World Cup stars **Megan Rapinoe**, **Carli Lloyd**, **Rose Lavelle**, **Alyssa Naeyer** and two-time U.S. player of the year **Julie Ertz**,

the 28 players summoned to Tampa, Fla., by new coach **Vlatko Andonovski** include forward **Sophia Smith** of Stanford. Smith, 19, is the only nonprofessional and only player without a U.S. national team appearance on the roster.

— KEVIN BAXTER

The Chicago Fire hired former U.S. youth coach **Raphael Wicky** as their coach.

ETC.

Evansville coach placed on leave

Evansville placed men's basketball coach **Walter McCarty** on administrative leave and ordered an investigation into his behavior.

The university released a statement saying it has received reports about McCarty's off-court behavior, including a recent incident that appeared to be a Title IX violation. Title IX is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.

Michigan forward **Isaiah**

Livers, the team's leading scorer, is out indefinitely with a left groin injury.

Miami fired offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach **Dan Enos** following a 14-0 loss to Louisiana Tech in the Independence Bowl.

Washington Capitals star **Alex Ovechkin** decided to skip NHL All-Star Weekend for the second year in a row. ... Chicago defenseman **Brent Seabrook** and **Calvin de Haan** were ruled out for the rest of the season because of injuries. ... The U.S. rebounded from a loss to Canada with a 6-3 victory over Germany at the World Junior Championships.

The Kansas City Royals signed third baseman **Maikel Franco** to a \$2.95-million contract.

Russia will appeal its four-year Olympic ban for manipulating doping data.

Elbert Dubenion, a receiver who played key roles in the Buffalo Bills winning consecutive American Football League titles in the mid-1960s, died at 86.

Horse racing in state is possibly in jeopardy

[**Santa Anita**, from D1] head of its racing division. He took over in early November.

"Running a track like Del Mar or the Breeders' Cup is a fairly compact organizational structure," Fravel said. "Moving into a company that has five race tracks is a much more far-flung operation. It's harder to get my arms around. But there are a lot of good people, particularly at Santa Anita."

Fravel knows the Arcadia track is his top priority and understands the gravity of the situation.

"We're in a rebuilding mode and we need to instill confidence in our customers, horsemen on track and our wagering and attending public," Fravel said. "Our whole industry needs a new level of confidence."

The Stronach Group is banking on safety as the catalyst to the rebuilding project. It has instituted more stringent medication and veterinary oversight protocols. And it is a proponent of eliminating the riding crop or whip. There seems little doubt the survival of the sport, especially in California, could be in jeopardy if the frequency of casualties doesn't decrease.

Gov. Gavin Newsom and California Sen. Dianne Feinstein have been critical of racing in California and its inability to stop horses from dying on the track. Both have said if the problem doesn't get fixed, there could be dire consequences for the industry. Ani-

mal rights' groups have been a constant sight at tracks and CHRFB meetings, mostly calling for the elimination of the sport. There is the possibility of a ballot initiative that, if passed, could eliminate racing in the state.

On a national level, there is the bipartisan Horse Racing Integrity Act, which would call for consistent medication rules throughout the country. Currently racing is controlled solely by state-run bodies. In an effort to get in front of the pressure, the major tracks and ownership groups formed the Thoroughbred Safety Coalition, which hopes to standardize safety measures across the country.

The Santa Anita meeting was supposed to start on Thursday but was delayed until Saturday for concerns about the track condition after bad weather struck Southern California. In addition, the track would have had to take major races off the turf, making for a lousy wagering experience after anticipated scratches.

"We spent a lot of time looking at the CHRFB in-clement weather policy," Fravel said. "We're not taking any chances. Sometimes you just have to make those calls."

The CHRFB has offered a discussion point to Newsom that running on sealed surfaces be banned. A sealed surface is one in which the dirt is pressed down so that the water rolls off the top rather than penetrating the surface.

It seems in contrast to the findings of the L.A. district attorney's task force, which did not find that the racing surface was a factor in the breakdowns, based on the opinions of surface experts. The 17-page, graph- and chart-heavy report found no contributing factors led to the breakdowns.

"I don't think there is a contrast [of opinions]," Fravel said. "I think there are a lot of things that we have to learn about training on a sealed surface. It may not affect what went on at that time, but maybe the next time or two or three times down the road. Those are the kind of considerations that the racing industry is dealing with. While we learn the science, we're going to err on the side of caution."

The CHRFB has mandated that Santa Anita must cancel 12 dates, at the track's discretion, during this meeting, the implication that it doesn't want racing on bad surfaces.

"I think it's safe to say, if the choice is run or not run on a sealed surface that it's not likely we'll run," Fravel said.

The track is expected to be in near-perfect shape, with a backdrop of the snow-topped San Gabriel Mountains, on Saturday. There are 11 races, seven of them stakes races, including three Grade 1s.

The most anticipated race is the Grade 1 \$300,000 Malibu Stakes with Omaha Beach, who was the favorite for the Kentucky Derby before scratching with a throat issue.

He was second in the Breeders' Cup Mile. Also in the race is Roadster, winner of the Santa Anita Derby.

Bellafina, winner of the Santa Anita Oaks and second in the Breeders' Cup Filly and Mare Sprint, is in the Grade 1 \$300,000 La Brea Stakes. Gift Box, winner of the Santa Anita Handicap, is in the Grade 2 \$200,000 San Antonio Stakes.

Saturday's card is filled with quality horses and good-sized fields, except the Malibu, which has five entrants. But the other challenge Santa Anita faces is a dwindling horse population in the wake of all the troubles the track has endured.

Santa Anita mainstay trainers such as Richard Baltas, Phil D'Amato, Peter Eurton, Peter Miller and John Sadler are sending some horses to Oakland Park in Arkansas, keeping their options open should things turn bad at Santa Anita. Jerry Hollendorfer, who was banned from Stronach Group tracks after his fourth fatality at Santa Anita and two at Golden Gate Fields, will also run horses at Oakland.

"[The horse population] is down, no question," Fravel said. "And we're going to do the best we can to race four days a week. We're going to write races that fit our horse population. We need to send a message to our owners and trainers that we appreciate them and want them to run and be part of our program."

"It's all worth saving."