

## BOXING PROMOTION IS A KNOCKOUT

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\* The City Museum draws hundreds of people to the exhibitions, which were designed to highlight downtown activities.

All it took for several hundred people to stop thinking about the war in Iraq was to watch a dozen or so part-time pugilists pound each other for three rounds at a time.

The bouts, plus some beer and garage-band music, brought spectators to the Hoosierweight Championship, a sort of "Rocky" meets "Jackass" boxing competition. After ducking some legal jabs, organizers presented six intense matches of weekend warrior combat Saturday evening on the grounds of the City Museum, 701 North 15th Street.

Shock and awe, it was not. But the fights did hit their target: to bring people downtown and to create attention for the controlled, extremely amateur fighting that, in St. Louis anyway, has been confined to back yards during holiday barbecues.

"Part of the appeal is that the people are not very good at it," said spectator Dave Rutledge, 28, a Web designer. "Kind of like, 'Who knows what's going to happen next?'"

Added Eleanor Cameron, 26: "It's kind of traumatic seeing your friends getting punched in the face. Not injured. Just beaten. Resoundingly beaten."

But don't tell these boxers - some of whom have been training for months - they are not the real deal. Each match, except for the five-round finale, had a limit of three, three-minute rounds.

Saturday's match-ups included University City's Dominic "U-Town Beatdown" Robinson fighting Thomas "Akita" Crone for the heavyweight division crown; restaurateur Pablo "Jabbin' Jew" Weiss - known for his "unorthodox" punching style - against City Museum founder Bob Cassilly; and Jenna "Bludgeoning" Bauer versus Jenny "Killer Princess" Gordon in a femmeweight exhibition bout.

Also fighting was Keith Savage, 41, who owns a printing company during the week. On Saturday, he made an impression on the face of his opponent, Bradley "Pancakes" Bower, before the match ended with a technical knockout in the final round.

"This is awesome for the city of St. Louis," Savage said. "People from all over the region are here tonight."

The event was planned by Steven Fitzpatrick Smith, who has been holding bouts in his back yard since Memorial Day 2000, and Cassilly, who wanted to draw attention to the museum's extended weekend hours.

Hoosierweight, however, almost didn't happen. Last week, Smith received a cease-and-desist order from Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon, who said the event was illegal because it was not approved by USA Boxing Inc., the only national amateur sanctioning body recognized by the state's Office of Athletics.

Days later, though, Smith and the state settled. As part of the deal, Smith arranged for the presence of three licensed physicians and an ambulance. The doctors were ordered to perform physicals of the fighters before and after their bouts. Competitors also had to provide proof of health insurance before stepping in the ring.

Still, that didn't stop one member of the more conventional amateur boxing world from calling the event illegal at best and stupid at worst. Myrl Taylor, president of the Ozark Boxing Association, says he contacted Nixon's office after learning about Hoosierweight. Unsuccessful in stopping the event, he stopped by Saturday to see the jabbing for himself.

"I tried everything in the world to try and get this thing stopped," Taylor said before heading ringside. "This is not like a couple of guys sparring in the back yard. This is an event."

If somebody gets hurt, he said, it would be a blow to the whole sport.

"They are not going to say some idiot got killed," Taylor said. "They are going to say some boxer got killed."

But it did not appear anybody was seriously hurt - though Savage's opponent did have a bloody nose. Smith, the boxers and their spectators said they hope Hoosierweight fighting has a future in St. Louis.

"It's a great cross-section of people showing what downtown has to offer," said Weiss, before losing by decision to Cassilly. "It's only going to get bigger."

• Caption: PHOTOPhotos by ROBERT COHEN / POST-DISPATCH (1) Color Photo - With her glove on her heart, Elizabeth "La Loba" Vega listens to the national anthem before her fight Saturday night against Traci "Bad L'ass" Angel on the City Museum. Vega won the bout by unanimous decision. (2) Photo - Keith Savage (right) tags Bradley "Pancakes" Bower during a heavyweight bout at the City Museum on Saturday night. Savage won the three-round fight by technical knockout.

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