

The power of publicity - Blurring the lines of sport and entertainment

 By [Rob Garden](#), issued by [Levergy](#)

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"It's going to be great entertainment - that's the most complimentary I can be about it. It's two different sports." - Ricky Hatton

On 26 August 2017, the world will witness a spectacle, the likes of which has seldom been seen in the industry of sport. Whatever your views on Floyd Mayweather vs Conor McGregor, it will be (commercially at least) the biggest event in the history of combat sports. But how did a fight, which is being referred to by some as a circus act, go from a crossover TV event to the most lucrative boxing match in history? The answer, quite plainly, is through publicity.

In the world of combat sports (and arguably in sport as a whole) it is only Mayweather and McGregor who can transform what is essentially an exhibition match into a sporting event of this magnitude. The reasoning behind this does not only lie in the fact that these are two athletes who have reached the pinnacle of their respective sports, but also because both individuals are the two greatest self-promoters sport has seen since Muhammed Ali. They both have the unique ability to make people take notice of everything they say and do. It is these two, playing the main characters in the story of the fight, together with the backing of UFC and Mayweather Promotions, who will lead you to believe that this is a sporting event for the ages.

The pre-fight pageantry has already begun: cue the global press roadshow; smack talk, money flaunting and slick promo videos; all cleverly crafted through the lens of what could easily be mistaken for reality television.

Through social media, broadcast, YouTube and the press, we will be given the chance to intimately follow every step of the build-up to what is being billed as the clash of the two greatest fighters on earth. It will be entertainment value the likes of which we seldom see in a sporting context. Slowly we will all be reeled into believing the hype, ensuring that 26 August becomes unmissable for anyone following the hysteria cleverly disguised as the precursor to the event.

It isn't beyond the realms of exaggeration to label Mayweather, despite his numerous personal shortcomings, as the greatest boxer in history. In late August, he will take to the ring with a 49-0 record, one win shy of eclipsing the record he holds jointly with Rocky Marciano. His opponent in this record-breaking attempt will be partaking in his first professional boxing fight. Anyone who believes the result is anything but an inevitability is mistaken. Yet, through more spin than that experienced by the heads of Mayweather and McGregor's numerous knock-outs, and a positioning of a match-up between the two greatest fighters on the planet, you will believe.

Although the masses will be seduced into believing they will bear witness to the greatest boxing match in history, the reality is that the publicity machine surrounding the fight has choreographed, with the precision of Mayweather's defensive strategy, nothing more than a once-off money-making exercise with arguably no real lasting effect on either boxing or UFC.

Mayweather vs McGregor is not the first time we have seen an attempt at creating hype around a made-for-TV sporting event. The 70s saw Billy Jean King take on Bobby Riggs and win; Michael Johnson took on Donovan Bailey over 150m with the aim of crowning the fastest man on earth; the Proteas take on the Springboks annually in the Nelson Mandela Legacy Cup and, in perhaps the most infamous of them all, Mohammed Ali took on Japanese wrestler Antonio Inoki (giving the world a chance to witness a 115kg wrestler kicking the world's greatest athlete in the groin). None of these events are remembered as sporting spectacles. They all however provided the platform to achieve vast exposure and commercial value for both participants and sponsors alike.

In countering this stance, the argument can be put forth that one can read Mayweather vs McGregor fight analysis from

some of the most respected boxing (and UFC) analysts in the world. Pundits are not only weighing in on the chances of each fighter, but also postulating on the positive effects this event may have on each of their sports. How can it thus be the case that people who are respected in their fields are weighing in on an event holding no real sporting significance? The fact of the matter is, the hype around the fight has reached such levels that these individuals/publications cannot afford to miss out on the readership and engagement opportunities it affords them. The Mayweather vs McGregor publicity juggernaut has pulled everyone in and no one can afford to be left behind.

Mayweather vs McGregor won't have any negative ramifications on either sport but equally it won't create any real legacy in Boxing, UFC or either of the fighters' careers. It won't be remembered as a great boxing event (in the way we remember Ali vs Liston or Foreman) and once the fighters take to the ring it won't be the spectacle we have been led to believe it will be. But because of the publicity; the genius leveraging of two of the greatest entertainers in sport, you will believe, you will watch and it will be one of the most commercially successful exercises in the history of sport (in comparison to Mayweather vs Pacquiao, this fight is arguably more hyped, in a larger venue which means greater ticket sales, pay per view prices are set at a relatively similar rate and with sponsorship revenue estimated to bring in \$7m more according to [Forbes](#), Mayweather vs McGregor is all but guaranteed to blow its predecessor of the water).

Whether you believe this to be a boxing spectacle or merely an entertaining, made-for-TV exhibition, it is guaranteed to be a publicity stunt the likes and scale of which we are unlikely to see again soon. Until Mayweather vs McGregor 2.

ABOUT ROB GARDEN

Rob Garden is a communications specialist and Strategy and Communications Director at South Africa's leading passion marketing agency, Levergy. Get in touch at info@levergy.co.za

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