Cable, pay-per-view problems leave viewers fighting mad

May 3 2015, by Scott Mayerowitz

Floyd Mayweather Jr., left, connects with a right to the head of Manny Pacquiao, from the Philippines, during their welterweight title fight on Saturday, May 2, 2015 in Las Vegas. (AP Photo/John Locher)

For some boxing fans, the big fight Saturday night turned out to be
between them and their cable companies.

Strong pay-per-view demand for the Floyd Mayweather-Manny Pacquiao fight in Las Vegas caused problems for cable and satellite systems, especially when people tried to order at the last second, which delayed the start of the fight. It's another sting to the reputation of an industry that's already beset with criticism over poor service and competition from streaming video providers.

Still other boxing fans circumvented cable companies entirely, watching the fight live video-streaming apps such as Meerkat and Twitter's Periscope, which let users broadcast video directly to the Internet from their smartphones.

Some who used this workaround had tried to buy the fight and failed. Others just didn't want to pay to watch, bragging on Twitter how they saved the $100 fee. Some went as far as calling it the future and knock-out victory for social media, although there are no concrete numbers at this time of how many people watched via Meerkat or Periscope.

The next round may be between fight promoters and the streaming services. CBS, parent company of Showtime, which helped present the fight, declined to comment about viewers watching via the apps.

But last week, CBS and Time Warner's HBO took two websites to federal court—BoxingHD.net and SportShip.org—successfully blocking them from airing the fight. HBO has also previously criticized Periscope for allowing people to live-stream the premiere of "Game of Thrones" last month, a move it called "mass copyright infringement."

Scores of angry tweets directed at various providers complained of problems with both ordering and watching. Some users said when they tried to order, the fight wasn't available. Others complained of picture
problems or an inability to tune to the pay-per-view channel.

As for Saturday night, Jared Kraus of Pevely, Missouri was watching basketball—Game 7 of the playoffs between the L.A. Clippers and San Antonio Spurs—when the screen froze and went blank. Later on in the night, he had a few friends coming over to watch the boxing match.

"Cable's out. Missing a ridiculous game 7 and can't order the fight. Sad faces all around," Kraus tweeted.

"This has happened before, of course, but it usually returns to form within the hour," Kraus later told The Associated Press via email. "Not this time. I waited and waited and finally realized it wasn't coming back any time soon."

The fight watching was moved to his uncle's house and the cable did eventually come back but "by then I had missed one of the greatest playoff games of all-time and the fight was almost to its end."

Charter Communications, which provides cable to Kraus, did not respond to a request for comment.

Todd C. Smith, a spokesman for rival Cox Communications, said problems at his company were limited to people who were ordering the fight at the last minute.

"Customers who ordered the fight but were unable to see it should contact us for a full refund. For cases where customers experienced other technical issues during the fight, those will be evaluated on a case by case basis," Smith said.

Customer service Twitter accounts for Dish Network and Cox asked users whether they ordered standard definition or high definition feeds
of the fight, indicating there may have been issues with the standard definition feed. A similar account for DirecTV referred users toward a troubleshooting website.

Ellen Cooper, a spokeswoman for InDemand, which distributes the signal from the event to the cable companies, said there were no issues with her company's connection.

"It was flawless. There were no problems with that signal," Cooper said.

Time Warner Cable spokesman Rich Ruggiero said his company had two network issues in New York City; one in southern Manhattan and one in Brooklyn. He said both were fixed before the fight started. Any other Time Warner issues nationally "were highly localized," affecting a small part of individual neighborhoods.

The bout was expected to be the most popular in pay-per-view history, with an estimated 3 million households buying the fight at nearly $100 each.

"We're seeing and gracefully managing a lot of demand—which is a good thing," Dish Network spokesman Bob Toevs said.

DirecTV spokesman Robert Mercer said heavy volume of pay-per-view orders caused some problems.

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