

The VOICE of OLYMPICS

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Worlds best commentator leaves his mark on planet earth

“The Voice” Michael Schiavello recently returned from Beijing where he commentated the Olympic Games Boxing tournament for a global multi-feed of more than 105 countries, including all of Africa, India, the Middle East, The Pacific, New Zealand, Thailand, Singapore, Mongolia and beyond. Here he talks about the Olympic experience;

As usual the K1 and DREAM master orator did not disappoint when roguemag.com caught up with him on everything Olympics and China’s wonderful hospitality;

Q: You just returned from Beijing. What are your impressions of the city?

SCHIAVELLO: You know before I went I didn’t think Beijing would be much. I guess I got sucked into a lot of the negative press about China and Beijing and didn’t think it would be anything special as a city. I have to say I was so completely wrong. Beijing blew me away. It now ranks as one of my favourite cities in the world. It is an amazing place. The architecture is incredible, these enormous buildings constructed at angles that just makes the mind boggle. It’s the type of radical architecture you just don’t see here in Australia. There was this one building that had two massive towers connected by a bridge which I could not comprehend how the architects who designed it made it stand up as it was at an angle that would put the Leaning Tower of Pisa to shame!

The whole city is full of gardens, these beautiful gardens with exquisite topiary and flowers and weeping willows and finely manicured lawns. Then you have the more traditional Chinese buildings with those old shingle-styled roofs you only ever see in films. Overall it is just an amazing, vibrant city with a lot of style and personality.

Q: What about the infamous Beijing smog?

SCHIAVELLO: The day I arrived the sky was clear blue and I was like, “Huh? What smog?” Then a few days later the fabled smog arrived and it was thick, like a smoke or a fog covering the sky. It made it difficult to see buildings that were only a couple of hundred metres away. It didn’t smell or affect your lungs, it was just a constant haze that engulfed the buildings. Then the rain would come and wash the smog away for a few days and it would be clear skies again.

Q: So Beijing is on your recommended places to visit?

SCHIAVELLO: Absolutely! You know I didn’t see that many Western tourists there, they were mostly Chinese tourists from provinces outside of Beijing. I think a lot of Westerners probably got sucked into the bad press before hand and were a bit wary of what Beijing would be like. But I’m telling you, I can’t sing the praises of the city loudly enough. I’d go back in a heartbeat. There is so much to do and see there and it is so frikkin’ cheap! You can spend days at the Great Wall, the Forbidden City, Hou Hai Lake, Tianamen Square, shopping at the Silk Market. I definitely recommend it for a holiday.

Q: You commentated for over 105 countries. How did that come about?

SCHIAVELLO: I was contracted by TVNZ to commentate the Games. TVNZ also provides the ABU (Asian Broadcasting Union) with a global multi-feed of every sport, so we were broadcasting to more than 105 countries ranging from Africa to India, The Middle East (yes, even Al Jazeera!), The Pacific region, Mongolia, Singapore, Thailand and beyond. It was a real buzz knowing that two-thirds of the watching world were watching our live broadcast. The feedback I received from so many countries was immense. I got great feedback from people watching in Thailand, in New Zealand and even in Mauritius! The two major newspapers in Mauritius – ‘Express and Le Mauritian’ – both rang me during the Games to do interviews. It was a buzz.

Q: How many fights did you commentate?

SCHIAVELLO: Every fight. 272 in total. I gave the voice a good work out.

Q: Did you commentate them all solo?

SCHIAVELLO: Yes all but two sessions. Two sessions I did with USA's Bruce Breslow who has commentated seven Olympic Games going back to Los Angeles in 1984. He was great to work with, we had a ball, even if we had to rip off the headphones a few times because we were laughing so hard. It seems we have the same sense of warped humour and I pulled out a few unexpected one-liners on him.

Q: So your commentary style at the Games didn't deviate from your usual full-on style of commentary laced with humour?

SCHIAVELLO: It wasn't as full on as the K-1 stuff I do but it had the same enthusiasm and as the matches went on I incorporated a lot of humour. Amateur boxing doesn't focus on knockouts. There were only about four stoppages out of 272 fights and sometimes they can be slow and monotonous. So I picked it up and tried to sprinkle some humour throughout to keep it entertaining. My job is to make even the boring-ass fights entertaining to watch and if the fight alone isn't doing that I have to do it through what I say.

Q: Care to share any of the one-liners you used?

SCHIAVELLO: Um... there were heaps... 'he's scoring more than Tommy Lee at a boat party'... 'the Cubans have hung more gold around their necks over the years than Mr T'... 'a female groupie would have a better chance picking up backstage at an Elton John concert than this guy has of winning this fight'... 'I just set up a Myspace Page for this guy under the name 'Man Who Doesn't Jab' - he's already got 40 friends.'

Q: I'm sure those are comments nobody would have ever heard on an Olympic Games broadcast!

SCHIAVELLO: Yeah, I'm sure too! (laughs)

Q: Who was the best fighter you saw?

SCHIAVELLO: Vasyl Lomachenko from the Ukraine. That guy was on another planet. His performance was one of the best Olympic Games performances in history. I mean just fucking unbelievable. In his first fight he beat the world champion and gold medal favourite Albert Selimov of Russia 14:7 - absolutely spanked him. Then in the final he blasted his French opponent Kedafi Djelkhir to the astral plane. Pounded him out in one round. It was wicked. I predicted it too. Before the final the French television guys did an interview with me and asked me what Djelkhir's chances were against Lomachenko. I flat out said 'none!' and they looked at me as if to say, 'What? No chance! Impossible!' but I said to them, 'I have seen and commentated every fight at these Games and nobody could touch Lomachenko. Your guy hasn't got a chance at all.' Anyway, 90 seconds later Lomachenko had put three counts on Djelkhir and just annihilated him. The French guys looked at me mouth agape and said, 'Sh*t! You know your stuff! You were right!' I winked at them and said, 'Sorry guys but I told you so!'

Q: Were there any big names at the Boxing?

SCHIAVELLO: Evander Holyfield was there. Vlad Klitchko was there a couple of times. Don King made an appearance. Teofilo Stevenson was there supporting the Cubans.

Q: What about the Cubans! Not one gold medal!

SCHIAVELLO: I know. Big shock hey? Look, Cuban boxing is going through a transition stage where a lot of their big gold medal names of the past have retired - the likes of Felix Savon and Odlandier and Mario Kindelan - and this new breed is coming through. They did well, took home silvers and bronzes, but just couldn't land the gold. I think they will be super strong again in London in four years time.

Q: And Team USA didn't fare well either?

SCHIAVELLO: Nah, they were shocking. The only one who medalled was Deontay Wilder the heavyweight, but even he got wrecked in the semi final by like 15:1 or something if I remember. They were disappointing. Came with plenty of hype but one by one they fell by the wayside. I really liked watching Demetrius 'Boo Boo' Andrade, would like to see him go pro one day. Other than him they didn't impress at all.

Q: What about the Olympic scoring and judging. Your thoughts?

SCHIAVELLO: Pfft... ludicrous. I mean after Roy Jones Junior was ripped off in 1988 they introduced the electronic

scoring system whereby three of the five ringside judges need to pay a technique in unison for it to score. Thing is that there is no consistency! I cant remember how many times I saw the referee caution a fighter for hitting with the inside of the glove yet the judges paid the point! And once it's registered on the computer there is no going back. Hell, Bruno Julie from Mauritius copped a groin strike and the referee put a count on him, then cautioned his opponent for the groin strike, and the judges gave it a point! What the f**k is that?

Q: Overall then, besides the dodgy judging, your impressions of the Games are good?

SCHIAVELLO: No, my impressions of the Games are great! It went off without a hitch and the Chinese know their shit. They had 1.7 million volunteers! Those guys MADE the Games. They were so helpful and their work ethic was tremendous. Another thing I didn't see was one gun. There was no intimidation by security. I didn't see one policeman carrying a gun. It was all pretty much volunteers. Just amazing. We were so welcomed and made to feel so comfortable and privileged. It was just incredible.

Also I have to say a huge thank you to the amazing team at TVNZ. We had a crew of 150 people and they were all incredible. It was a surreal experience sitting there in the IBC (International Broadcast Centre) surrounded by such talents as Keith Quinn, Bruce Breslow, Steve Robilliard, Tim Neverett, John Helm… I mean just commentating legends. I was honoured to be a part of it all.