

# A boxing fan's confession

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You could see it in Katie Dallam's eyes when she stumbled out of the ring Wednesday night at the smokey, firefighters' bingo hall.

There was no there there. She looked like San Diego Charger quarterback Stan Humphreys after he took that vicious shot a couple of weeks ago. Only worse. Her face was bloodied. She walked slowly with a slight stoop to one side and a barely perceptible catch in her step on the same side. It was like she didn't have quite enough juice left to run both sides of her body.

It was a chilling sight. Her handler guided her through a maze of beer-burping fans to a makeshift locker room, where she would collapse from an apparent head injury. She was rushed to the hospital, where she was reportedly treated for a broken blood vessel in the head. Thankfully, Ms. Dallam is recovering.

I could see the stomach-churning hurt in her empty eyes — and I was standing half a roller-rink-turned-bingo-hall away, at the dark perimeter of this grim tableau. That's a tough admission in itself. It is somewhat embarrassing to admit to being a mild fan of boxing. But I am.

And like most boxing fans, I pretend to be drawn by the art and craft of the athlete. You can see it in the picture the *News-Press* ran Friday morning of St. Joseph boxer Rob Calloway defending his World Athletic Association light-

## TIMELY OBSERVATIONS



Mark Sheehan

heavyweight championship in the fight after Ms. Dallam's debacle. His eyes are clear and clearly on the target of his faster-than-a-blink jab. Rob Calloway fights are clean, crisp chess matches punctuated with thundering seconds of brutality. They are not clumsy, bloody brawls.

Ms. Dallam's bout was a bloody brawl. She was a puncher. Her opponent — Sumya Anani, the Island Girl — was a flailer. Most fights are stopped when the referee recognizes that one combatant can no longer mount a defense. Ms. Dallam's downfall was that she never mounted much of a defense while she remained tough enough to continue to lean into punches throughout the match. It was brutal.

It is a dishonest fan who denies that we are also drawn like moths to the light of boxing's brutality. Certainly, we are shocked at the blinding flash from the kind of brutality visited upon Ms. Dallam.

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Out of that shock comes a queasy, disturbing feeling that raises the inevitably chauvinistic question: Should women box?

It is a violent sport that can bring the worst out of its fans. It exploits its participants. It is uncivilized. But each of these arguments holds equally true for men. In our gender-equitable times, no argument against women boxing will hold up. I'm still old-fashioned enough to oppose the growing trend of showing women in physical fights with men in movies and television. And I am convinced video games that pit women combatants against men in blood-spewing fights does injure our collective civility. But boxing, unfortunately perhaps, will continue to prosper from tickets sold to those who want to watch and those who can't seem to look away.

Mark Sheehan's columns run on Sundays and Wednesdays.