

Poor Sales KO Erin Go Brawl II

By Declan O'Kelly

POOR tickets sales due to the recession have forced Irish Ropes Promotions to cancel their St. Patrick's Eve Erin Go Brawl II show at the WaMu Theater at Madison Square Garden.

The card was also meant to be the next stage for Irish Ropes' career after its acrimonious split from Derry fighter John Duddy, and the cancellation has left the future of the company unclear.

In a press release last Friday, Irish Ropes outlined the reasons for the cancellation. "This was a very difficult decision to make but ticket sales were way off compared to two years ago when the economy was much better here and back in Ireland," Irish Ropes Promotions president Eddie McLoughlin explained.

"We apologize for any inconveniences, especially to all of the boxers who worked so hard to prepare for their fights."

Though Irish Ropes made a business decision to cancel the show, there is no doubt that numerous fans are now making a trip to New York for nothing, not to mention the 20 odd fighters on the card who went through their paces getting into fight condition. Though McLoughlin acknowledges all of this, the potential financial loss, he says, was just too much of a hit.

"We apologize wholeheartedly. If I had even thought that there was a

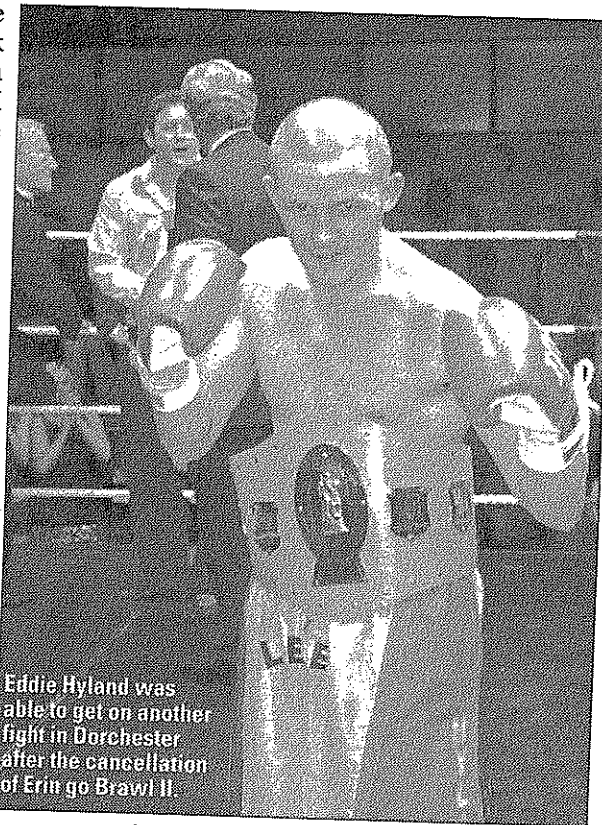
chance that we could break even or even lose \$100,000, I would have gone with it. But the facts are that I stood to lose \$200,000 on this, and I had no contract on any fighters to potentially make it up down the road," McLoughlin told the *Irish Voice* Monday.

"All that was gone was about 1,500 tickets from 5,000, and it wasn't going to get the jumpstart to bring it up to about 3,000 to get even. I didn't think we were going to get the walk up that we needed to break even here.

"That is the element of risk you take with these fights. We had no TV and we were depending solely on the ticket returns."

Breaking the news to the boxers on Thursday was not the easiest call McLoughlin has made. "They weren't too happy, but they were appreciative that we gave them as much time as we possibly could," he said.

When McLoughlin was asked if Irish Ropes has a future as a going concern he replied, "Well, we have to wait until the economy gets better. I'll still be keeping my



Eddie Hyland was able to get on another fight in Dorchester after the cancellation of Erin Go Brawl II.

license, but I won't be doing any show in the short term.

"This thing with Duddy didn't help, though the buzzword here is the economy. Our strong areas like Queens and Yonkers and in the city here, you mention the word boxing to them and they just get a shiver up their back. They are just sick of it."

Did the promotional company ever consider slashing ticket prices in order to redress the slow sales and keep the show alive?

"No, everybody was buying \$100 tickets, you know, and there were about 4,000 \$100 tickets there, so even they weren't going at the pace we wanted them to be going at," McLoughlin

said. "The \$50 tickets were the same, but we couldn't take it back any less than that. There were 3,500-4,000 \$100 tickets, and even if they had gone or even half of them had gone we would have been inclined to go with it." McLoughlin went on to add that Gleason's gym, normally a fertile outlet for ticket sales, had dried up this time

around. Also, the numbers on ticketmaster.com were discouraging.

The last time Irish Ropes had a show like this two years ago, sales on ticketmaster.com tallied between \$180,000-\$190,000. Before the cancellation on Thursday online sales were between \$12,000 and \$15,000, he says.

McLoughlin is trying to keep perspective on all of this. "Ninety percent of the world is in the same situation as I am today. There is an economic crisis out there. I saw Warren Buffett this morning on the TV saying that the world economy has fallen off the cliff, and I am just one of the

casualties," he says.

Though he admits that he won't hold a show in the near future, McLoughlin does not see this as the end.

"Maybe another protégé will come along, who knows. This boxing is like a drug; you always get a longing to get back into it again, and I am sure that this longing isn't going to quench because of this recent upheaval."

As the *Irish Voice* went to press on Tuesday, light welterweight Danny O'Connor (4-0) and super featherweight Eddie Hyland (11-1, 3 KOs) are the only fighters apart from Andy Lee to have secured alternate fights. Both will head to Massachusetts to fight on the card at the Dorchester Armory on Saturday night. Hyland will fight Alex Perez (23-33-4) in a scheduled six rounder, and O'Connor will fight in a four round contest.

Heading the card in Dorchester is Eddie's brother, featherweight Patrick Hyland (15-0, 8 KOs), who will fight Carlos Guevara (12-8-2, 9 KOs) in a 10 round feature for the IBA International Super Featherweight title.

Also on the card is Cork light middleweight Gary "Spike" O'Sullivan (6-0, 5 KOs), who will fight Jimmy LeBlanc (12-15-4, 4 KOs) in a scheduled eight rounder. Irish American super middleweight Dan Conway will make his pro debut. Tickets are still available by calling 508-746-0176.

In other boxing news, Olympic silver medalist Kenny Egan, who spent time in New York after going AWOL last week, has pulled out of his rematch with Chinese Olympic champion Xiaoping Zhang on the undercard of Bernard Dunne's world title fight on March 21.

Fellow Olympic medalist Darren Sutherland (2-0, 2 KOs), who won a bronze in Beijing and turned pro straight after the Games, notched up his second win as a professional super middleweight last Friday when he stopped Sjarhei Navarka in the third round in Wigan.

According to boxrec.com, John Duddy (26-0) will fight Billy Lyell (18-7, 3 KOs) at the Prudential Center in Newark on April 24 in a 10 round fight at middleweight. A press conference will be held on St. Patrick's Day at Legends Bar in midtown to confirm full details of the fight.

Tickets for the fight at the Prudential Center are available by calling Greg McIntyre at 917-528-7379 or Barney Moore at 917-559-8467.

Matthew Macklin (23-3, 16 KOs), whose parents are from Tipperary and Roscommon, will fight Wayne Elcock (19-3, 19 KOs) for the British middleweight title this Saturday night in Birmingham. Both men are from the Birmingham area, and this has developed into a grudge match with both fighters trading jibes in the press.

Lee Added to Dunne Undercard

By Declan O'Kelly

THOUGH middleweight Andy Lee (16-1) lost his chance to top the bill at the WaMu Theater in Madison Square Garden on March 16 after Irish Ropes cancelled Erin Go Brawl II, promoter Brian Peters wasted no time in adding him to the undercard of super bantamweight Bernard Dunne's world title challenge against WBA champion Ricardo Cordoba on March 21 at the O2 Arena in Dublin.

As the *Irish Voice* went to press no opponent has been finalized. For now, Lee is happy to be getting back in the ring after the longest lay-off of his career.

"Right now I don't know who I will be fighting," Lee

told the *Irish Voice* Tuesday morning. "I am grateful that Brian put me on the card as he saved the day, or else I would have had no fight after all this training."

Lee will leave Detroit on Friday and arrive in Dublin on Saturday a week ahead of the fight. Peters' matchmaker Tomas Rohan is working on finding an opponent for the southpaw.

Events in New York have left Lee somewhat annoyed and the 24-year-old was unhappy with how things transpired. "It was unbelievable, I was so angry," he said of the cancellation.

"What can you do, you don't know what is really behind it," he says. "They (Promoters Irish Ropes) say it is ticket sales, but I

know they are in a lot of hassle with John Duddy in court and they got a lot of bad publicity over that.

"Maybe that had an effect on sales. You never really know what is going on behind the scenes."

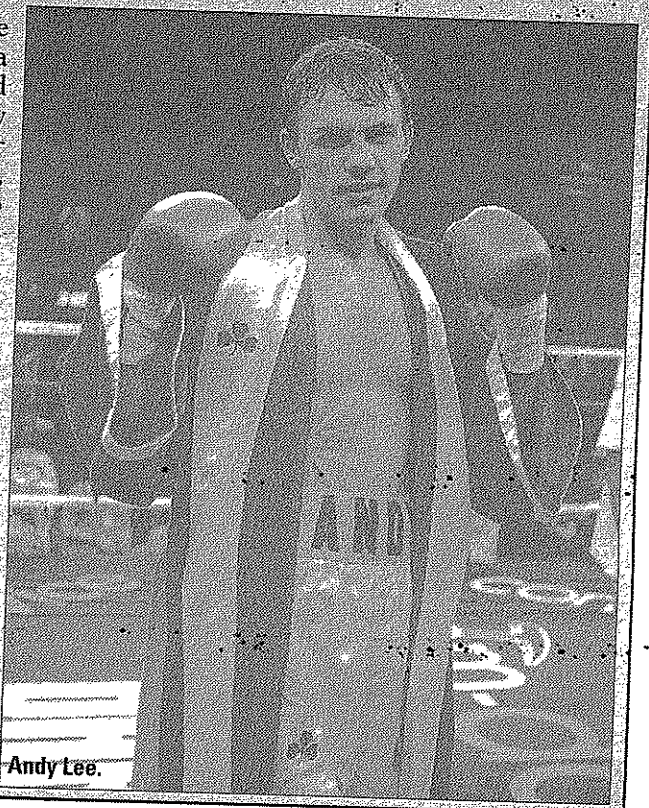
Lee also feels that the cancellation could be damaging to his own reputation as a box office attraction. "They messed me around the last time I fought on the John Duddy undercard in 2007 when they tried to cancel my fight at the last minute after my family had come over and now it is the same again. I hope they get what they deserve," Lee says.

The Detroit-based Limerick man is trying to take the positives out of the whole situation.

"It's no bad thing to be fighting in the O2 Arena for the first time on Bernard Dunne's big night. Hopefully it will be a historic night for him and for Irish boxing, and it would be great to be a part of that. It is expected to be a sell out with 9,000 people so you can fall over and land on your feet."

Lee's trainer Emanuel Steward is also moving on from the cancellation.

"The disappointment of the March 16 fight in New York soon evaporated when my good friend Brian Peters came into the picture," he said. "Brian is a very pragmatic guy always thinking on his feet. To put Andy on the card on this momentous night for Irish boxing was a wonderful gesture."



Andy Lee.