

---

Will the World Championships provide AIBA with the positive headlines it is desperate for?

08/09/2019



Boxers are currently congregating here in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg, located just over 1,000 miles east of Moscow, for an ultimate showdown.

They will battle it out over eight weight categories for the next two weeks, fighting for the honour of being named the best male boxer in the world. Such an achievement which would be a career-high for many.

As the athletes warm up to compete, the 12-day event will almost come as a relief to the International Boxing Association (AIBA). The governing body seem permanently stuck in a state of crisis, creating headline after headline with little sign of respite.

AIBA still lack a permanent leader after the controversial Gafur Rakhimov formally resigned last month. To add to the confusion, Morocco's Mohamed Moustahsane confirmed he will remain as Interim President until March, having withdrawn his initial resignation last week.

The crisis has of course impacted on the World Championships, with Rakhimov's resignation coming just a month after the International Olympic Committee suspended recognition of AIBA, stripping the organisation of its involvement in the boxing competition at Tokyo 2020.

The World Championships will subsequently no longer offer places at the Olympic Games as it has done so in the past. A series of qualifying tournaments have been organised for next year instead.

Despite this, boxers at the Yekaterinburg-Expo still have a world title to fight for and competition will be just as intense. With the spotlight finally on the sport itself, the World Championships may give AIBA an opportunity to put its current political soap opera on pause.



Cuba's Julio César La Cruz Peraza is seeking his fifth world title in Yekaterinburg, having recently triumphed at the Lima 2019 Pan American Games ©Getty Images

A record number of athletes are set to compete, with just under 500 athletes from 89 countries registered for the event. Most boxers will be returning to defend their title, while Olympic champions are also expected to feature.

Boasting both accolades and captaining the Cuban delegation is 30-year-old Julio César La Cruz Peraza, who has dominated the 81-kilogram category since the 2011 World Championships in Baku. Despite already earning four world titles and an Olympic gold at Rio 2016, La Cruz has shown no sign of letting up, claiming his third Pan American Games crown in Lima last month.

As always in boxing, the Cuban team is strong. La Cruz is joined in Yekaterinburg by three compatriots also looking to retain their titles: Yosvany Veitía will compete in the 52kg, with Andy Cruz Gómez back in the 64kg and Erislandy Savón battling in the 91kg.

The delegation will be hoping to replicate Cuba's success in 2017, when the country topped the medal table with five gold medals and two silver.

Uzbekistan finished second at that competition with one gold, three silvers and two bronze, although a number of these medallists, including a number of Rio 2016 Olympic champions, have since become professional.

However, Uzbekistan's reigning 49kg Olympic champion, Hasanboy Dusmatov, may have the



chance to upgrade from the silver medal he received at the 2017 World Championships in Hamburg. Cuba's Joahnys Argilagos, the gold medallist on that day, has since defected from his country and turned professional.

The 75kg category is also expected to go undefended after the Boxing Federation of Ukraine announced last month that they would not send an official delegation to Yekaterinburg. Subsequently, Oleksandr Khyzhniak will give up his place on top of the podium in the event.

Nine boxers will represent the host nation, although Russia have lost their 91kg Olympic champion, Evgeny Tishchenko, to a professional career. Their hopes may instead lie with Muslim Gadzhimagomedov, recent gold medallist in the same weight category at the European Games in Minsk.



Yekaterinburg is aiming to develop a strong sporting identity, hosting a number of events after the World Boxing Championships ©Youtube

Indeed, organisers will hope for Russian success to crown a maiden visit from the World Championships to the country. The competition has only previously been held in the Soviet Union, taking place in Moscow in 1989.

Yekaterinburg itself makes for an intriguing location, having replaced Sochi as the host city in January. The history graduate in me was intrigued to discover that the city is home to the golden-domed Church on the Blood, execution site of Russia's ill-fated royal family, the Romanovs.

Alongside playing a significant role in Russian history, however, the city is also on its way to creating a strong sporting identity.

After the World Boxing Championships, Yekaterinburg will first welcome a number of teams for the International Volleyball Federation Men's World Championship in 2022, before hosting the 2023 Summer Universiade. Surely these events will be used as a springboard for what seems to be a vibrant and modern city.

Despite the ensuing political drama in the background, the AIBA World Boxing Championships have been set up to be an exciting affair in a dynamic location, complete with defending champions and emerging talent alike.

Athletes may have some task ensuring that the action in the ring is as sensational as what is taking place outside of it, but the competition has the potential of taking some of the pressure off boxing's embattled governing body.

Members will have their fingers crossed that events in Yekaterinburg go swimmingly, with the governing desperate for a positive headline for once.

---