YouTubers physically fighting each other could become a regular event

Jake Paul is the latest YouTuber to get his own boxing special. If the team behind the growing sports streaming platform Dazn is right, it'll be more than a one-time event.

Following the successful rematch between his brother, Logan Paul, and fellow YouTuber KSI earlier this year, Jake is the next creator Dazn thinks can pull in a sizable audience. Jake Paul will fight YouTuber and boxer Ali "AnEsonGib" Gib in the penultimate match of a special boxing event on the eve of Super Bowl weekend in Miami, Florida. The full event has three world fights, including a headliner match between Demetrius Andrade and Luke Keeler.

If it draws new viewers, Dazn has plans to team up with more creators and pit them against each other in the boxing ring — and potentially in other sports as well, according to Joe Markowski, Dazn's executive vice president of North American content.

"The fight was bigger, the hype was bigger, and the returning revenue was bigger."
"Our appetite has been whetted to do more in this space," Markowski said. "We are interested in longer term schedules with them and their community to help further engage this audience on a regular basis, and drive subscribers because we're a subscription based service."

The fights can also be a win for top YouTubers who participate. YouTubers have long complained about the

difficulties of predicting how much money they'll make from ads served on their videos, and YouTube's rules and preferences can feel like they're constantly in flux. Dazn offers them a guaranteed paycheck and something to get their fans excited about, too.

Markowski declined to offer viewership numbers for Logan Paul and KSI's fight, which took place in November, but he said "they were significantly bigger than the first fight," even when offered "at a higher price point" in certain regions, like the United States. All Markowski would tell *The Verge* is that from an overall metrics perspective, "The fight was bigger, the hype was bigger, and the returning revenue was bigger."

Although Dazn is known within the boxing community and boasts eight million subscribers globally (about two million less than HBO Now has in the US) it's not exactly a household name. The service, which launched in 2016, charges $20 per month or $100 per year for access primarily to exclusive boxing matchups, as well as some additional tournaments, archival footage, and behind-the-scenes content. Outside of the United States, the streamer is known for other sports, too. It exclusively carries various league games in different territories, including recently acquiring the rights to the majority of UEFA Champions League matches in Germany, for example.

YouTubers are expected to promote their fights on YouTube, bringing new audiences to boxing

The target audience is avid sports fans. So bringing YouTube creators — especially those with spotty histories like KSI, and Logan and Jake Paul — wasn't something that every executive was on board with when Markowski initially pitched it. John Skipper, former head of ESPN and current chairman at Dazn, was one of those executives.

"John's on record saying that he was skeptical initially,"

Markowski said. “It was something that not everyone in our business understood. John won’t mind me saying that I’m of a younger generation than most of my senior executives. That success was backed up by metrics. Now, there are various potential YouTube names that I hear John suggest.”

With an open runway to pursue more potential YouTuber-focused content, Markowski saw an opportunity to grow beyond the diehard sports fans signing up. Although not every fight can be between high-profile creators like Logan Paul and KSI, who spent months upon months releasing diss tracks, vlogs, Instagram stories, and meetups to hype up their fight, Markowski believes there’s a way to generate similar drama.

“Part of the strategy here is to introduce the significant audience these guys bring to the sport of boxing.”
“We can make a lot of YouTubers fight but very few will have the energy and interests,” he said. “We have to choose which events we want to support. Now that the proof of content is there, we’re in an exploration phase, and I’m pretty bullish that we can make some significant moves in the coming months.”

Bringing YouTubers onto Dazn through boxing doesn’t mean those personalities can give up YouTube. Creators like Jake Paul are contractually obligated to promote the fight through their existing channels, Markowski confirmed, adding that it’s a “central part of the commercial agreement.” He declined to comment on whether Dazn gets a portion of the creators’ ad revenue for videos that are related to the fight, or if those are considered additional sponsored content. Leaning on YouTubers to use their platform, and millions of subscribers, to generate hype for a fight is key to the event’s success.

So when Jake Paul announced on YouTube that he’s quitting the platform to become a boxer, he’s not really. Teaming with creators brings a new audience to Dazn who stay for the fight and may retain their subscription even after the event is done (this is partially why Markowski is open to exploring more

frequent matches). Data suggests that traditional boxing fans, even those who may have complained prior to Logan and KSI's match, stayed right to the end.

Traditional boxing fans stuck around for Logan's fight
"We only have one data point, but the audience continued to grow throughout the night, and there was no drop off," Markowski said. "The vast, vast majority, upward of 90 percent of the audience who came to watch the two really professional boxing events, stayed to watch Logan and KSI. Part of the strategy here is to introduce the significant audience these guys bring to the sport of boxing."

Markowski may be bullish on the advantage YouTube creators like Jake Paul bring to Dazn, but the team's commitment is to ensuring the streaming service is seen as professional in the eyes of leagues, subscribers, and the industry. The end goal is to grow subscribers, naturally, but Markowski also sees it as a way to bring new fans to boxing in general. By his math, if even "10 to 20 percent of the new audience [during the KSI and Logan Paul fight] engaged with these professional boxers who they're exposed to for the first time, that's a good win." Experimentation is crucial for this reason, and if working with YouTubers turns out to work against Dazn, Markowski is ready to step away.

"If we start doing it every week and the quality of the sport diminishes, we'll look into it," he said. "That's why we pick and choose the fighters we want to work with. We're cognizant of the importance of being a significant boxing broadcaster and the credibility that comes with it. Conversations about expectations and what we do next are ongoing, but we have fantastic relationships with the talent in this space."

Jake Paul's fight will air on January 30th, 2020.

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