

## WHAT I WOULD HAVE TOLD THE COMMITTEE TODAY

Written by Charles Jay  
Tuesday, 21 May 2002 18:00

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Let's face it - there isn't anyone on that committee today who wants to hear what someone like me has to say. I guess anything I would tell them would simply be too dangerous for certain interests that are endeavoring to maneuver themselves politically as part of the process of instituting boxing legislation.

You see, I'm not there to be "programmed"; I'm not going to sit there and spew out a bunch of happy horseshit so I can be "politically correct". If you're going to represent yourself as someone who is going affect change, then by all means, **AFFECT CHANGE**.

But - if I was sitting at that table, and was not too intimidated by the surroundings, maybe this is what your humble reporter would tell those politicians:

My name is Charles Jay, and I have been editor/publisher of TotalAction.com, an internet site, for the past three years. TotalAction contains THE FIGHT PAGE, a boxing section that is a preferred stop for many boxing fans, and essential for those in the boxing industry and boxing media.

Prior to my involvement in electronic publishing, I was a part of the boxing industry and had been since 1981, literally before I got out of college. Over the course of the next 16 years or so, I operated in many capacities - that of a manager, a booking agent, a matchmaker, a promoter, a publicist. I have also worked behind the scenes with TV networks, ratings organizations, and casinos which have presented boxing. I have been a broadcaster for several television outlets, serving as a blow-by-blow or color commentator for 15 world championship fights.

I was never what you would call a major mover or shaker, but nonetheless have observed what has gone on at ALL levels of boxing, from the grass roots level all the way up to the top. Now, as a member of the media, I see myself in a unique position to offer some insight as to what the industry is and does.

There was a time when boxing was a major sport in the United States - unfortunately, the effect of a number of factors - namely, the nature of corruption within the industry and the rise in popularity of sports like professional football, basketball, and others, due to the increased media coverage and the explosion of television - have left boxing in a position where, because of its lack of marketing expertise, and lack of general order, it has now joined horse racing among the list of dying American sports - a state of affairs where the participants are perhaps too self-absorbed to even be aware of it.

Over the years I have seen commissioners come and go. I have seen congressional hearing after congressional hearing purportedly aimed at remedying problems that have served to shuffle boxing toward the back of the pack among so-called "major" sports. I have seen the legislation passed in an attempt to address these problems. And I can tell you without

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equivocation that this effort has missed the boat, so to speak, on a continual basis.

Along the way I have begun to question whether this effort is well-meaning or whether it is just another exercise in political masturbation. Surely there is no excuse for not taking a more practical approach to the important issues - it's not as if the outlets are not available, especially now - where representatives of this Committee, if they have any concern at all for the subject matter of these proceedings, would not have access to some of the pertinent information.

Yet this information has been completely and conspicuously ignored. Recent attempts on my part to share - rather selflessly, I might add - some of the possible, and indeed, practical solutions to real-world problem areas in this industry have been met by your minority counsel with a reaction I would characterize as disdainful. As far as I'm concerned, since he is the legislative person who is most closely connected with the subject of boxing, this offers a barometer as to the real level of sincerity contained in this campaign.

The task of any responsible reform effort should be three-fold - to create an atmosphere whereby parties on all levels of the boxing industry can benefit from fair and equitable business practices; to ensure that the competitors, who take the physical risks, will be afforded all the medical protections and safety precautions possible; and, perhaps most importantly, to restore public confidence in a sport that is taken somewhat less than seriously by the majority of sports fans, not to mention the lion's share of the media that covers professional sports. If you'll pardon the pun, boxing has become a "punchline".

But could anyone blame the skeptic?

How can anything that has been done at the legislative level thus far be taken seriously when some promoters are using the power of their contracts to grab much more than 50% of the money their fighters are supposed to earning for their sweat and toil, and no mechanism is in place, or has even been considered, to expressly forbid it from happening?

How can anyone still be content with legislation that allows a television executive to double as a boxing promoter, and, with the full acquiescence of the network, is permitted to exercise a strong influence over the success or failure of his direct competitors, at the same time using his position to extract contractual agreements and purse money directly from fighters - all in conflict with the laws governing restraint of trade?

As a so-called "agent of change", why shouldn't an organization like the Association of Boxing Commissions be summarily dismissed when it has placed, without objection, on its executive board, a Kentucky commissioner who, with its complete knowledge, has openly flouted the Federal boxing safety laws in place, creating a set of circumstances that very well may have left a former heavyweight champion paralyzed and brain-damaged for life?

Why should anyone pay attention when the laws by which these alleged "reform advocates" propose to regulate boxing have a completely archaic view of the dynamic that currently exists in the REAL boxing world between fighters, promoters, managers and

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networks?

Why are "phony reformers" continuously coddled by your committee, while those who may have unconventional ideas are ignored?

Why hasn't there been an intelligent discourse on the subject of promotional contracts - the documents that have the most enduring effect on the boxing business today - aside from that discussion that concern "coercive" clauses, which in most cases are completely irrelevant?

Why isn't anyone discussing the fact that fighters spar in gyms across this country while on medical suspension, without proper supervision, under which circumstances they can get hurt from the accumulation of head blows far easier than they can in an actual fight?

Why isn't Jack Kerns, the nefarious commissioner from Kentucky, on hand to answer for himself in front of this committee?

Why aren't members of ABC, who nominated, seconded, then cast their votes in favor of Kerns' candidacy for the ABC board, here to explain their decision? Don't you think that would be important information, if you're even considering handing over the responsibility of national boxing regulation to them?

You've had people getting up here for the past couple of years and telling you there are problems with enforcement of the Ali Act, problems with uniform rules and regulations, problems with establishing a standard for contracts, but is it even recognized that those very same people are the ones who have been in a position to do something about it, yet never have?

Just last year, Greg Sirb, who was then president of the ABC, said before this committee, and I quote, "There needs to be sanctions put on those state and tribal boxing commissions that do not hold uphold the federal laws or that have antiquated rules/regulations that put the boxer in either physical or financial danger." He went on to refer to "Such things as requiring that an ambulance along with paramedics and proper equipment be at ringside at all times, that the promoter is bonded in a certain amount to ensure all boxer and other bills including insurance coverage are paid in a timely fashion....."

Jack Kerns, the chairman of the Kentucky Athletic Commission, required none of these things - which incidentally are mandated by the Professional Boxer Safety Act - as a general practice on the shows within his jurisdiction. On the night Greg Page slipped into a coma in a Kentucky ring, Kerns had neither an ambulance, nor oxygen equipment at ringside. He failed to have a licensed doctor present, and even the doctor he had there had long since departed the ringside area. The promoter also did not have insurance.

That's tragic. And Greg Sirb was well aware of it too, as he appeared on an ESPN "Outside the Lines" program last Easter Sunday. Approximately a month after that program, he made the statement before this Committee. Two months after that, he presided over the

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ABC annual convention in New Orleans. I have the complete minutes from that meeting. At no point during the entire process, from Kerns' nomination right on through to his election to the board, did Sirb raise his voice to object, or even question, the potential presence of a very dangerous commissioner on this national board. No word about "sanctions". Nothing about "antiquated rules and regulations" that put a fighter in "physical danger", then later, "financial danger" due to the lack of insurance. Wouldn't that have been an opportune time to bring it up?

Now, is anyone on this committee going to sit there and tell me with a straight face that this is the kind of individual you want implementing "sweeping reforms" as a national boxing "czar"?

If it is, I would sincerely question whether your intent is to accomplish ANYTHING through this particular process.

I will tell you this much - if you did nothing more through your legislation than create an atmosphere whereby at least one promoter in every major city in America could sustain a local fight club and make money WITHOUT having to have television, you would have done far more than an all of your previous collective efforts combined.

Somehow, though, I just don't see that happening. No one here recognizes that what happens on the grass roots level of the boxing industry, over the course of time, has a tremendous residual effect on what happens at ALL levels. Of course, you'd have to know something about the mechanics of the industry to realize that.

Unfortunately, you have gotten a "dearth" of intelligence in that regard, and when it is put before you, you don't want to listen to it.

Perhaps it's an aspect of this industry that is not "sexy" enough for you. Maybe the whole focus of this thing is to "get Don King".

If that's the case - if this is all a big "show", I would suggest you get yourselves re-focused in a hurry. There's a lot more happening than meets your eyes, and if you're going to pass judgment on any of it, it would behoove you to develop an awareness of it.

The point is, as long as we have a situation where, time after time, we continue to meet on Capitol Hill and time after time issues that are truly material and relevant are suppressed or cast aside, why in the world should anyone take YOU seriously?

I would invite your questions, although with all due respect, I think perhaps I deserve answers to mine first.

Thank you.

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