

Written by Charles Jay
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Maybe I'm naive, but I've always been amazed by the veracity with which some of these sanctioning bodies work. And to think that all of the supposed "safeguards" that have been put in place by the Professional Boxer Safety Act and the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act, the following situation could actually still occur:

Back in the spring of 1987, a shady Jacksonville, Fla. promoter named Phil Myers announced that he had secured two North American Boxing Federation championship fights for an upcoming show he was producing. One of those fights was to pit Dorsey Gaymon, a hometown boy who had previously fought for the IBF cruiserweight title, against slick veteran Larry Alexander for the NABF heavyweight title. The other pairing, a more curious one, matched Bash Ali, the one-time NABF cruiserweight champ, against another Jacksonville fighter, Tommy Richardson - at stake the NABF cruiserweight title that had been vacated by Bert Cooper, who was then trying to make a move into the heavyweight division.

What was indeed curious about this particular matchup was how Richardson got clearance to participate in it in the first place. After all, he was just a novice fighter, having compiled just a 3-1 career record, with a grand total of just NINE professional rounds over the course of almost two years.

Nonetheless, Richardson somehow was inserted as the #14 contender in the NABF's cruiserweight ratings, which conveniently made him eligible to fight for the title - although as we demonstrated in a

similar situation in Chapter 22

, some strings must have undoubtedly been pulled with the NABF to make Richardson eligible for a VACANT crown, since there no doubt were many available contenders ahead of him to choose from.

Well, taking a look at this whole scenario, it really got me thinking, not only because a fighter with no credentials at all had found his way into a title shot, but because the promoter of the event (Myers) had a well-earned reputation of leaving a bevy of stiffed, pissed-off people in his wake.

So I made a bunch of phone calls, and eventually wound up talking to Dickie Cole, who was the ratings chairman of the NABF at the time (and yes, the same Dickie Cole who currently runs the boxing commission in Texas).

According to Cole, the NABF had been sent information on Richardson that credited him with a record of 10-0 with 10 knockouts, and presumably on that basis alone the fighter got rated. Cole would not identify the individual who sent the record to him, but did say he was "an East Coast promoter".

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When I informed him about Richardson's REAL record, as well as the fact that he had only been in scheduled four-round fights, Cole seemed taken aback. And that surprise turned to embarrassment when I explained exactly how I was able to substantiate what I was telling him.

Actually, it was very simple - I got Richardson's documented record from Fight Fax, the current "boxer registry", which at the time was headed by Ralph Citro. And if that weren't enough, I told him I had actually booked Richardson into the one fight he had lost - a four-decision to the debuting David Nalls on the Holyfield-Qawi undercard just nine months before.

There was an obvious question, one that I held back asking, since I didn't want to cause Cole total humiliation - how was it that I could gain access to that information about Richardson, while at the same time the NABF found themselves duped by a phony record, especially since Ralph Citro was a member of the NABF's ratings committee? Didn't they consult with Citro on these matters?

Actually, the answers to those questions would have been somewhat interesting; back in 1987 it didn't cross my mind that perhaps the NABF was perfectly willing to accept the false record in order to facilitate getting a sanctioning fee. Of course, that thought crosses my mind now.

Funny thing is - it's quite possible that what was sent to these guys was a KICK-BOXING record of Richardson's, and that even THAT was phony. Myers had always talked about Richardson being a top-shelf kick-boxer, but we were only able to document one or two fights of his through the full-contact organizations that were around at the time.

Frankly, I don't know if I could take credit for this or not, but some time shortly after my inquisitive phone call, the NABF pulled the sanction from the Ali-Richardson fight, and subsequently took Richardson out of its ratings.

However, the fight found another home - the World Boxing Council, which is more or less the "parent" organization of the NABF. At the time the WBC was experimenting with their "junior world championships", which, as far as anyone could tell, were designed to generate additional sanctioning fees while proving nothing else in particular.

When I talked to Cole about it, he said he had "no idea" how Richardson got the title shot, or for that matter, which WBC official actually did the sanctioning for the event. I figured he would know, since, in addition to his duties at the NABF, he was also the WBC's head man in the United States at the time. He also made it clear that at no time did Richardson hold a position in the top 30 of the WBC rankings, which would have been a requirement for the "junior championships" (though I distinctly remember him being listed as #30 the following month in the cruiserweight ranks).

I would be remiss if I did not mention that by sheer dumb luck, Richardson managed to take Bash Ali the entire distance in losing a 12-round decision, although I think it's also

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important to point out that it was probably more of a reflection on Ali, who, even though he's still fighting today at age 46, was probably something of a shot fighter back then. As for Richardson, he was knocked out in one round by Dwight Qawi and Johnny McClain after that, then faded from view.

The point of this piece, though, is that the same thing could conceivably happen now.

The way the Ali Act is written, the sanctioning bodies are required to put forth the criteria upon which they will rate fighters; however, once they do that, regardless of what form they do it in, the sanctioning body is usually left alone because 1) they have more or less complied, if only in a cursory fashion, and 2) there are no comprehensive, coherent, standard criteria to use as an effective barometer against the standards of any particular sanctioning body.

Not having the perspective from which to work, the ABC will usually choose the easiest alternative, which is to do nothing.

In fact, the only time sanctioning bodies have been put "on suspension" by the ABC - for example, the WAA and the WBU - it was because they simply didn't comply in sending their ratings criteria to the Federal Trade Commission.

As it stands now, the only way to force a sanctioning body to answer specific, in-depth questions about its changes in rankings is for a boxer to make a formal request for it - I'm assuming in the way of an inquiry or protest.

And since there are no established standards, there is nothing, at least as specified by Federal law, that requires a fighter to have a winning record, nothing that requires he have a scheduled ten-round fight under his belt; nothing, in fact, that requires him to have any professional experience at all, in order to be rated by a sanctioning body. There is only the sanctioning body's own rules and standards; and as we know all too well by now, an outfit like the NABF will throw those standards in the trash can whenever it becomes expedient to do so.

Because the law is written in such a way that explanations are required to be put forward only in the case of a fighter's complaint or the movement of a fighter out of the top 10 of an organization, and because the vast majority of fighters are unaware that this part of the law exists at all, it's very unlikely that you're going to have many "challenges". Therefore, there is really nothing standing in the way of another 3-1 fighter getting an NABF title shot by using a phony record. And in cases where the sanctioning body is the most corrupt entity in the process, that's bad news indeed.

Can't we change that?

fightpage@totalaction.com

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