

A HEAVYWEIGHT IMPLOSION:

Written by Charles Jay
Monday, 08 July 2002 18:00

In the midst of what may have been one of the most bizarre days in the lives of a lot of people in the boxing industry, one member of heavyweight Michael Grant's camp was heard to say, "Just who the hell is Charles Jay anyway? No one reads anything that's on the internet. All that stuff's just a bunch of slop."

To that gentleman, I certainly trust that this story, the story that preceded it, and the stories that follow, will serve to properly introduce both me, AND the medium.

Hello there, from both of us.

In this topsy-turvy story, let's begin, appropriately enough, where it ended.

As Amy Hayes, the ring announcer for last Friday night's fight show at the Menominee Bingo Casino in Keshena, Wisc. was wrapping up the evening's proceedings - which were low-lighted by a delay of Guinness-record proportions, followed by a ten-round "exhibition" match - she announced to the crowd, in what must qualify as one of the most shameful and surreal plugs of all-time, "This was not Michael Grant's idea. For the real story about this, go to Fightnews.com."

Well, she's right about one thing - it was not Michael Grant's idea.

As far as the rest of it is concerned, Fightnews HAS no idea, believe me.

In point of fact, the whole fracas germinated out of something that was MY idea. So inasmuch as we actually seem to be a material part of this story, I suppose I should tell you what happened surrounding boxing's latest "circus" - at least as far as I know it.

Who better, right?

By the way, if you haven't read

Chapter 28

of this series, please read it now before going any further.

The rest of you can come along with me.

Suffice to say that if anyone connected to the Wisconsin promotion had come to the TotalAction website on the afternoon of July 4th, a crisis of major proportions may very well have been averted.

But apparently, the location was so far away from anything connected with civilization that

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there was a scarcity of internet access, and most cell phones simply were not working at all. The casino was not just 35 miles outside of Green Bay, it was, in the words of Teddy Atlas, "Thirty-five HARD miles."

So it's not so unbelievable that nothing posted on the website even reached people until Thursday evening at the earliest.

And even then, it came only by way of a fax transmission.

My understanding is that on Thursday, for motivations that, I imagine, were completely their own, Grant's managers were supposedly in a huff about the opponent that was to face Olympian Clarence Vinson on the show - a fighter named Sheldon Wile. When Gary Gittelsohn, the manager for Vinson, countered with the point that perhaps the opponent for Grant (Thomas Williams) should be cause for much greater concern, the angry Grant braintrust seemed not to know what he was talking about.

As the day wore on, Gittelsohn began to hear more objections about Wile - from Eric Bottjer, the matchmaker for Cedric Kushner Promotions, and Jeanie Miranda, a principal (along with Jackie Kallen) in a company called "The Fight Brokers", which had actually sold the fight package to the Menominee group.

Finally, it got to the point where Gittelsohn, who felt the complaints from the Grant camp might just be an effort to deflect attention away from Williams, was annoyed enough to call home and have Chapter 28 of "Operation Cleanup", a story entitled

"I CAN FIND DODGE CITY IN THE ATLAS"

faxed to him, after which he presented both Bottjer and Miranda with copies.

Later that evening, a hard copy of the story also found its way into the hands of Grant's handlers - Craig Hamilton and Jim Thomas.

By all accounts, from Thursday night to Friday morning, the reaction of Grant's management tandem gradually progressed from:

- 1) Surprise that such a story had indeed been written;
- 2) A certain degree of denial about the story's validity (hence, the "slop" comment);
- 3) Indignation (mostly toward Gittelsohn) that the story was being circulated at all;

and finally,

- 4) The hard realization that some damage control had to be implemented - sooner rather than later.

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Whether or not these guys were previously aware that Thomas Williams was under a Federal indictment for fixing fights is a subject that is open for debate, but one certainty is that on Friday morning, Gittelsohn, who was upset at Bottjer's interference in particular, placed a call to New York and the offices of Kushner, who has a promotional contract with Grant. As a result of that call, Jim DiLorenzo, Kushner's right-hand man, got on the phone with Bottjer. With an understandable degree of concern, DiLorenzo directed Bottjer to investigate finding a new opponent for Grant.

At this point, enter Robert Mittleman, the Chicago-based matchmaker/agent who had booked Thomas Williams into the fight and accompanied him to Keshena.

Mittleman's name is mentioned prominently in the audiotaped conversation between Williams and former manager George Peterson - a tape that eventually led to Williams' indictment. And he is also the American agent for Danish promoter Mogens Palle, bringing over a score of opponents for Brian Nielsen (including Williams), many of whom have given performances that were suspicious at best.

Kushner's office was made aware of the status of Thomas Williams' legal situation several weeks ago. I had been apprised of that. And so, at that time, I completely discounted the participation of Williams as a possibility.

What I DIDN'T know was that, instead of killing the fight, Kushner had simply inquired, through Bottjer, as to whether Williams was indeed under an indictment. Bottjer, in turn, asked Mittleman. The response that had come back from Mittleman was a resounding "no" - there was no indictment, only an investigation.

Kushner says he took the opportunity to ask Mittleman directly "about four or five times" during the week the two were both in Atlantic City for the Klitschko-Mercer show, which took place on June 29. Time and again, Mittleman dismissed any possibility that there were indictments hanging over Williams' head. Mittleman's repeated denials were adamant enough that Kushner figured it would be superfluous to prod him on it any further.

In retrospect, he obviously should have pressed the issue even more.

In truth, not only was Mittleman very much aware that Williams is currently under indictment and facing a trial next month on charges of federal sports bribery, but Mittleman actually fears that he may end up being indicted himself as a result of the ongoing Federal investigation, to the extent that he has hired private detectives to "dig up dirt" on potential witnesses, including Peterson.

Clearly, given his nefarious history, Mittleman was not a trustworthy source of information about ANYTHING, much less one of his fighters, especially as he was to profit from Williams' appearance.

Despite the fact that they indeed wanted another opponent, the folks at CKP also realized that as the afternoon approached, accomplishing that was going to be a tall order indeed.

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A call was placed to Greg Sirb, listed as "past president" of the Association of Boxing Commissions, to get an opinion. Sirb apparently told CKP that Williams was not currently on the national suspension list, which would have been absolutely true.

Then Marc Ratner was contacted at the Nevada Commission office. In substance, Ratner told them the same thing he had told me on Wednesday - that even though he felt Williams' KO loss to Richie Melito, the subject matter of the indictment, was legitimate, and would testify to that effect at the trial if asked, he would have reservations about licensing Williams to fight at this time, pending the actual results of the trial, given the fact that the alleged dive had taken place in a Las Vegas ring.

So while there was an indictment, there certainly was not a hard-and-fast suspension of Williams, from any commission in the country.

Sitting with Williams as the only opponent that was available to them at the time, such news may have, at least for a moment, given rise to hope on the part of Bottjer that he could keep Williams "alive" as the opponent, and the show might just be able to go off without any more complications.

If that were indeed the case, such hope didn't last long.

NEXT: Part 2 - Atlas in the Afternoon

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