Written by Charles Jay
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Travis Simms stopped Anton Robinson in the eighth round last Friday night to win the North American Boxing Association's 154-pound title.

But the next morning, it was Simms who actually suffered the stoppage.

When the fighter showed up at the First Third Bank in Louisville, Kentucky in an attempt to cash the paycheck for his evening's work, he was told that the account it was drawn against - that which belonged to the promoter, Chris Webb Properties Inc. - was completely devoid of cash.

Not that Simms should ever have had to go through that exercise anyway.

"Our contract specified that Travis be paid in cash," says Kurt Emhoff, attorney and advisor to Simms. "After all, this is Kentucky."

The problem is that no one was on hand to protect the fighters - a perplexing situation that unfortunately exists in far too many ABC-member state boxing commissions these days.

Webb, who purportedly is in the real estate business in the Louisville area, could not be reached for comment. Nor could he be reached Saturday morning by George Martinez, president of the NABA, who was written a check for his sanctioning fee. Martinez had never done any business with Webb, and was understandably worried that his check wasn't any good.

Instead, "I got a message that he (Webb) had a problem with his child," Martinez. "So I didn't get to talk to him."

As of Monday, Webb was telling people, through intermediaries, that the purses would be paid by Wednesday, because the venue the fight was being held at (Louisville Gardens) was holding his money. However, he never informed the fighters of that on Friday night.

Standard procedure on a card such as the one in Louisville is to write checks to the participants as per the terms of the contracts they signed, in addition to any expenses that were agreed upon, and have the participant sign the check over in exchange for cash. The money is generally taken out of the evening's receipts, or is taken out of the bank beforehand so that there will be funds to pay the fighters, many of whom had to travel to the event and leave the next morning.

In Kentucky, the promoter posts a bond to secure the tax money due the commission, but there is no assurance that the purses will be paid.

When Martinez asked the "Minister of Maim", Jack Kerns - chairman of the Kentucky

Athletic Commission who also doubles as First Vice-President of the Association of Boxing Commissions - whether there were any measures taken by the commission to ensure that checks wouldn't bounce, and that fighters wouldn't get ripped off, Kerns told him, "No, there isn't anything like that. But maybe it's something we'll have to bring up at the next meeting," then pointed out that the commission itself was protected through its rules and regulations.

In other words, Kerns' posture - and seemingly the prevailing attitude not only at his commission, but the majority of commissions in this country - is that the foremost concern is getting their own money, with the welfare of the fighters strictly an afterthought..

Perhaps foreseeing that his neglect in this matter might lead to some trouble, Kerns, the ABC Vice-President and executive board member, grabbed his fellow Kentucky commissioners and fled the arena immediately after the show concluded. Fighters were in a state of uncertainty as to how or when they were going to get paid, since Webb had long since left as well. Finally, at 1:30 AM, an hour and a half after the last bell had rung, someone named Nicholas Clark showed up and started writing checks, though he had no cash in his possession.

No one was very happy. A number of fighters, including Robinson, said they were under the impression that their checks were going to be endorsed in exchange for a cash payment. Simms was able to reach Webb on his cell phone shortly after receiving his check, and the promoter promised to rectify the situation when Simms got back to the hotel (Caesars Indiana). But even though their rooms were right next to each other, "We never heard from him (Webb) again," according to Simms' wife, Sandra.

The contract Simms signed with the promoter, which included the "cash clause" Emhoff demanded, was required, according to Kentucky Athletic Commission rules and regulations, to be "submitted to the commission for approval not less than five (5) calendar days prior to the date of the proposed show."

But what does it say about the state of boxing regulation in this country if the very agency (the commission) that is empowered by such rules and regulations does not do anything to enforce them?

"One thing is for sure," said Emhoff. "I'll never send a fighter into Kentucky again."

Who could possibly blame him?

Of course, this is a direct reflection on Kerns, whose negligence in the critical area of fighter safety nearly led to the death of Greg Page last March, but evidently produced enough political support to get him elected First Vice-President of the ABC four months later. And this past July, Kerns was retained in his position with the ABC, in order to protect him in a lawsuit that has been filed by Page against him. Not only that, he has been given additional responsibilities by the organization.

To be fair, not every commission runs as slipshod an operation as Kentucky. In Nevada, for

example, the commission requires new promoters, who don't have a track record with them, to post all of the purse money with a third party - usually in a casino cashier's cage - and will customarily hold all the checks to be paid to fighters until it is time to issue them.

Of course, as you may have guessed, Webb had done promotions before in Kentucky, and Kerns admitted that everything had not gone smoothly in the past.

"He told me there had been a problem with this guy (Webb) before," said Martinez, "but that he eventually straightened it out."

Why fighters and other participants should have to go through a hassle like this in the first place is a question no one in Kentucky seemingly can answer.

" I mean, what the hell is the purpose of a commission if it can't make sure the fighters get paid?", says matchmaker/agent Johnny Bos, who has been down this road before with people from the ABC.

I can think of one other primary reason - to create as safe an atmosphere as possible for the fighter.

Unfortunately, Kentucky - with ABC vice-president Kerns - fails on both counts.

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