Along the way, one thing I cannot afford to lose sight of is that I'm not necessarily here to scandalize people, but instead to push ideas forward - ideas which can be brought to life to make boxing a better sport - and a better business - in some way. Remember the sub-title of this series - "A Blueprint for Boxing Reform". When one has the chance to implement some kind of reform measure - something to bring the game forward - one has to look very seriously at that opportunity.

Sometimes that opportunity comes from a very unlikely place; so unlikely, in fact, that if it ever were to materialize, it would initiate a genuine change in the landscape of what we now know as world championship boxing.

It all started with a conversation that took place between myself and Guy Jutras about a week before the WBA was to hold its October 16 "public hearing" to discuss irregularities in the heavyweight ratings it had compiled as it came out of its September convention.

In those ratings, as you know, Larry Donald had been moved up to #3 in the world, without fighting. Fres Oquendo had been moved ahead of David Tua, despite being knocked out by Tua a matter of months ago. And Kirk Johnson, who had just filed an unsuccessful protest with the WBA over his disqualification loss to heavyweight titleholder John Ruiz, was moved from #5 to #10, despite not having fought in the interim.

I was explaining to Jutras that the behavior of his organization was highly suspect, and cautioned him that his people left themselves open to some stories that could be very damaging.

Jutras, an honorable guy, was concerned with the series of events that had made the hearing in New York necessary; concerned enough that he made a suggestion to me.

"Why don't you come onto the WBA Ratings Committee?", he said. Well, I really didn't want to do that, because even though it would have afforded the opportunity to see the system from the "inside", I wasn't convinced my presence would make that much of a difference. And how could I be assured it wouldn't turn out to be some form of subterfuge?

But then a thought occurred to me. I said to him, "There's something else we can do. And if you're amenable to it, I think we can talk."

What I proceeded to outline to him was a plan which had been in the works for a few months.

Nearly two years ago, I had taken over the administrative function of something called the Independent Boxing Writers' Rankings, a media poll that had been more or less abandoned by its originators. That poll doesn't exist anymore, but not long ago I embarked upon

creating a new, improved poll that would include a number of worthy media people who weren't invited to take part in the IBWR poll.

I am calling this, at least for the time being, the "World Experts Poll". The plan is to bring together people from across the globe, involved with covering boxing in a variety of media, and let them exercise their judgment, within certain guidelines that can easily be followed.

The proposal is that this "World Experts Poll" become the major component in the formulation of the WBA ratings.

It would be implemented according to a pre-determined formula in which the aggregate vote of the "Experts Poll" and the results of the WBA Ratings Committee would each count for a certain percentage. My original proposal was that the poll count for 75%, although I would concede that we'll probably have a negotiation on that issue.

The intention is for our poll to begin in January, with the "affiliation" with the WBA being simultaneous with that, if at all possible.

What it amounts to is an effort to provide the most open and democratic process ever created to rank professional fighters. And undoubtedly it will be. It would be unprecedented and revolutionary for a sanctioning body to devise ratings in this manner. Whether or not it will change the way sanctioning bodies operate, or how they are perceived, might be largely dependent upon the success of this venture.

Through this process there will be no more "closed-door" procedures for ranking fighters. All ballots in the poll would be available for review upon request, as would the results from the WBA ratings committee. The procedure should easily fall within any acceptable guidelines set forth in the future by the ABC, simply because we would probably ask our voters to follow the criteria the ABC has established. The changes would be easily explainable - they'd be the result of the open voting process.

Another component which is on the table would mandate that yours truly, as a "representative of the press", so to speak, monitor the results from the WBA Ratings Committee, in order to ensure that the WBA has followed its own "Norms and Procedures for Ratings" which is available for viewing on its website, in accordance with the Ali Act. Whether anyone agrees with the formula by which the ratings are compiled by the WBA, it is important that the organization be consistent in the way it adheres to its criteria, and that is one thing that would be scrutinized.

There's no escaping the fact that there would be some public relations advantages for the WBA in going along with my plan, namely:

* It would offer an aura of credibility to the process that may not currently exist in the public's perception.

* It would demonstrate that the WBA was interested in remedying the problems that exist in

its organization.

* It would silence certain critics like the ESPN hypocrites, because their arguments would no longer be valid.

* It would offer an alternative that is, on balance, more credible than the "Ring Magazine bandwagon" that some ill-informed people seem to have jumped on.

Naturally, in order to get involved with a sanctioning body on this level, some soul-searching was necessary first.

You know, there were ways in which I suppose I could have exploited the WBA situation to where it could have advantaged "Operation Cleanup". After all, I'm quite sure I was the first member of the press who knew about the movements in the WBA's heavyweight ratings, and in fact, I was the one who informed Kirk Johnson's management that he had been dropped from #5 to #10 by the WBA.

Yes, in the wake of recent developments, it was clear that the WBA was in a position where it had to do SOMETHING. The timing was right, and I took advantage of that.

At the same time though, here was a unique opportunity - a way to accomplish a greater goal - to REFORM a certain component of the system. A chance to become part of a solution, rather than to further exacerbate a problem.

Under those circumstances, it doesn't seem out of place to give people the benefit of the doubt when they seem willing to cooperate.

Of course, speaking about this poll is not just a hypothetical matter. One thing that must be understood, and has been explained to the WBA, is that the World Experts Poll is going to exist - and I mean as an independent organization - whether the WBA is involved or not. It will not be an extension of the WBA. That is critical to the credibility quotient, both on our end and that of the sanctioning body.

We're not particularly interested in interfering with the championship rules and policies of a sanctioning organization. However, because we are going to be in a position where we must do whatever we can to preserve our membership, I have made it crystal clear to the WBA that the tolerance threshold for any kind of malfeasance will be very low. If somewhere along the way, the members decide there is a strong reason to not want to be involved, we will have no choice but to accede to their wishes. The major concern of our participants will be executing genuine reform of the ratings process. We are about creating integrity, not creating QUESTIONS of integrity.

Those are the parameters by which we will operate. Reaching an accord within these parameters is an issue that has not been completely resolved as of this date.

Will it come to fruition? Are we being duped? Right now, I don't know those answers. The

major determinant will be the level of sincerity with which the WBA chooses to deal with what is in front of it. I am perfectly agreeable to keeping an open mind as we move through each step.

We'll have many more details on this plan as we move into the next phase of "Operation Cleanup".

Or haven't I told you about that yet?

Stay tuned.

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