The 8th Round

This wasn't a very merry Christmas for Greg Page. The former WBA heavyweight champion is still, for the most part, confined to a wheelchair, slurs his speech, and requires extensive physical therapy three times a week. He had received a token amount of financial assistance toward his considerable medical bills from the state of Kentucky, though not nearly enough, and nothing that came easily, until his disability benefits took effect.
His wife Patricia thinks in time he may be able to stand up on his own. How much time, nobody knows.

He is in the midst of waging a legal battle against the Bluegrass State, the Kentucky Athletic Commission, KAC chairman Jack Kerns, executive director Nancy Black, ringside "physician" Manuel Mediodia, promoter Terry O'Brien and others, stemming from the collective neglect they demonstrated in connection with a fight last March in which Page almost lost his life.

As if it's any consolation, things are a lot better than last Christmas, when Page could hardly move or speak at all. When the Kentucky commission was in such a state of denial about its complicity that it was insulting to the sensibilities of any reasonable person. When Patricia had to go, hat in hand, from state agency to state agency in order to find any kind of aid whatsoever for Greg, only to rebuffed most of the time.

At least now Greg Page has a new friend. His name is Dale Crowe, who, in case you didn't know, happens to be the opponent who sent Page to the canvas and eventually into a coma on that fateful evening (March 9, 2001, to be exact). Over the course of time, Dale Crowe began to feel incredibly guilty about his role in the near-fatal incident. That's only natural, because fighters - the men who put their physical well-being on the line every time they step into the ring - have a clear, first-hand understanding of the risks involved that the general public simply can't fully comprehend. And it follows that there is a common empathy for each other that may be hard for even the combatants to put into words.

The irony, of course, is that Dale Crowe, the one guy who really has nothing at all to feel guilty about, has carried the Page tragedy around like an albatross, while the dirty, filthy scoundrels who are actually at fault - people like Kerns and Black - could not be more defiant, could not blame each other enough, and could not flee quickly enough toward any legal partition they can hide their gutless asses behind.

And talk about gutless - the people who run the Association of Boxing Commissions are so gutless it makes me want to puke. Kerns, who is almost without question the most dangerous person in boxing, from the standpoint of fighter safety, is one of their own. The group showed such tacit approval of his abhorrent actions and policies that four months after Page's "accident", it elected him to the position of FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT of the organization, and is now offering its moral support to Kerns as he fights the Page litigation.

No wonder Larry Hazzard has pulled his New Jersey commission out of the ABC, with no doubt others to follow suit.

In effect, the group comprised of individuals who now collectively control the regulation of boxing in this country, who want substantial responsibility and power if newly-proposed legislation creates a "national" commission, and which includes people like Tim Lueckenhoff (current ABC president) and the ever-disingenuous Greg Sirb (past president) who are in the power grab to be the boxing "czar" should such a bill come to pass, is actually lining up with Kerns and AGAINST Page, because at Kerns' request, it is aiding him in creating the facade that he is a "respected" member of the boxing community.

He is, in fact, the antithesis of that.

And ABC people seem to have convinced that "special contributor to boxing", Senator John McCain, and errand boy Ken Nahigian, that it's not an issue worth getting passionate about, or even addressing to any extent.

You should take a VERY strong message from all this.

Look, the injury that Page sustained might well be something that could happen to anyone who steps into the ring. That's just the nature of boxing, or any contact sport, for that matter. But the SEVERITY of that injury is something that could have been minimized if not for the fact that some very silly, stupid, careless people were in a position of authority. Well, there is no room for silly, stupid, careless people on a boxing commission.

The thing is, I'm not sure there are too many people associated with the ABC who agree with me.

Oh yeah, the ABC gave Page a token donation of $300 from something it calls its "Professional Boxers Assistance Foundation". Of course, that fund has over $5700 sitting in it, presumably gaining interest somewhere, administered by Sirb, overseen by no one. I don't know if it's still there, what they intend to use it for, or how it's decided who it goes to, but who better than someone who has been rendered disabled by the malfeasance of one of the ABC's own board members?

I know of private individuals who have given more - people who probably couldn't afford to, but did so anyway, because they were so OUTRAGED by the fate that befell Page. Relative to Kerns' level of responsibility in this matter, the $300 is such an insult that I almost suggested to Patricia that she should tell Sirb he can take his money back and stick it where the sun doesn't shine. But I'm not that selfish.

You know, when I originally published "Horse Manure Isn't the Only Thing That Stinks in Kentucky", our special report on the Kentucky commission and the Page story (which you can find in the first "Operation Cleanup" book), I offered the thought that, and I quote, "if this isn't the perfect illustration of why we need a national boxing commission, I don't know WHAT is".

Well, I think I'd have to change my tune there. Now, it's more like "maybe yes, maybe no". Through personal experience and close observation, I've now had the opportunity to see what the people who would conceivably populate a national commission, and certainly those who would head it up, would do about a situation like that which happened to Greg Page. And I've undoubtedly gotten my answer.

Nothing positive. N-O-T-H-I-N-G.

It's now been demonstrated that it's more important to secure the vote of Jack Kerns at an ABC convention than it is to potentially save lives. Sadly, not one of them have the character, or the conscience, of a Dale Crowe.

What a thing to have to write on a holiday like this.

But it's precisely why, if Greg Page is going to have a better Christmas NEXT YEAR, it will only be because a court of law has made it so.

Society in general can only hope for that much.

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