

Written by Charles Jay  
Friday, 11 July 2003 18:00

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## **The 64th Round**

(NOTE: The "Q & A" passages in these reports, as well as the direct quotes, are a product of a deposition taken from Jack Kerns, dated December 10, 2002)

How does one become the chairman of a boxing commission? Surely, there are any number of ways it can happen. Disturbingly, the common thread that would seem to run through all these appointments is - an obvious political connection that takes precedence over all else, and a general disregard for any level of boxing background on the part of an appointee.

Clearly, the mechanics behind this decision-making process needs to be re-examined, especially in the cases of those states where the chairman has more of a "hands-on" involvement in the actual administration of the agency. And Jack Kerns of Kentucky provides a not-so-shining example.

The real reason behind how Kerns actually became a member of the Kentucky Athletic Commission is somewhat shrouded in mystery; however, it can be safely assumed that appointing someone without a high school diploma to a position where he could be the head, titular or otherwise, of a state agency is not an everyday thing, especially when that individual is not a former boxer.

So let's begin our examination of the individual who was responsible for one of the more insidious scandals in recent boxing history, and how he wound up getting as far as he got:

John Charles Kerns was born in the Commonwealth of Kentucky, but while a teenager, moved to live with his sister in Battle Creek, Michigan. Attending Battle Creek High School, he had only finished the eleventh grade when he left school to join the Marine Corps in 1949. Upon his discharge, he worked as a brakeman on the railroad, then as a laborer at a company called Newport Steel. According to his own story, he eventually came to serve as a union representative, although he has been unclear on who he really represented, and spent a total of 13 years at the plant before being laid off - once again for reasons which he neglected to make clear. He went to work selling insurance for a short time, then was, in his own words, a "collector" for a bank. Whether that involved a little "muscle" or not, we don't know.

Most substantially, Kerns was a jailor. Working at the Kenton County Jail in Kentucky for over twenty years, eventually becoming chief deputy jailor, which, one would assume, carries some authority with it.

He retired from the jail in 1989, and subsequently drifted into a number of different occupations. He sold security equipment to some of his old jail contacts for about a year, did some private

## KENTUCKY: FRIED Part 11 -- KERNS IS TOUGHMAN-TRAINED - AND IT SHOWS

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---

security work, then worked at a pawn shop near Turfway Park racetrack.

Of course, there are some we have talked to who intimate Kerns did not leave the jail voluntarily at all; rumors persist that there were possible transgressions on his part that precipitated his departure. That was not elaborated on in his deposition, nor have any details been uncovered as of yet by our investigation.

Kerns, in all fairness, at least purports to have some minimal boxing background. He claims three amateur bouts, and testified that he had served as a ringside judge in a few fights, though he was rather nebulous in his deposition as to how many fights he had actually participated in. He was also unclear in making a distinction between which of those assignments were on professional cards and which were amateur cards, and how many of them actually took place inside the state of Kentucky.

He did say that the International Boxing Council (IBC), which would have been under the control of the late Blackie Gennaro, appointed him to do at least one title fight, which would have given him a temporary judge's license in the state of Ohio, which is where the bout took place.

According to Kerns, it was Fred Lampson, the former chairman of the KAC, who initially got him involved with commission activities. It's interesting to note that throughout his deposition, Kerns repeatedly referred to him as "Lampton".

What's most interesting, though, is where Jack Kerns received the lion's share of his "training" for a job with the Kentucky Athletic Commission. For that, let's go to the deposition:

"Q: So in any event, in the late eighties or early nineties, Fred Lampton asked you to serve as a judge?

A: Uh-huh. Before I even served as a judge, he had asked me - like one time he asked me to come down to Louisville to help him out at a fight, and I went down there, just different things he asked me to do, and then he asked me if I would be a judge.

Q: When you say he asked you to come to Louisville to help him out on a fight, what did he want you to do?

A: Like just go around and check people to see if their bandages were correct and just anything in general that had to do with getting fights going.

Q: When you were asked to be a judge at a fight, where was that? What was the first time you served as a --

A: The first one was in Richmond, Kentucky at the National Guard Armory.

Q: Was that a professional fight?

A: Yes, sir.

## KENTUCKY: FRIED Part 11 -- KERNS IS TOUGHMAN-TRAINED - AND IT SHOWS

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---

Q: And was that under the auspices of the Kentucky Athletic Commission?

A: Yes, sir.

Q: Before serving as a judge, did you have to undergo any training or certification?

A: They worked me on like Tough Man and things like this. You know, Tough Man, they don't keep records. That is not a professional fight, and they'll break judges in like this or give them a chance on that first. If they don't do any good, they're gone. If they show potential, then they'll stay with them and try to help them get on to professional."

In 1994, Kerns was appointed to the boxing commission by then-Governor Brerenton Jones. But truth be known, he can't really identify HOW he got appointed. He assumes it was through Shirley Hughesman, who was, at the time, the Democratic Party chair for Kenton County. From his testimony, apparently he had lobbied the county's previous Democratic chair, Mike Hammons, but Hammons, evidently a man of uncommon foresight, did not pursue anything on Kerns' behalf.

A year after becoming a KAC member, Kerns was appointed to the chairmanship. And how did that happen? Here is Kerns' response - his level of grammar and elocution undoubtedly justifying such a lofty appointment:

"Different members of the board had went to bat for me and talked to their chairmen and that there and asked that I be appointed."

It was the administration of current Kentucky governor Paul Patton that placed the supervision of boxing in the state of Kentucky into Jack Kerns' hands.

That turned out to be a very fateful decision indeed.

With his new appointment, Kerns became Kentucky's representative to the Association of Boxing Commissions.

But can he even spell A-B-C?

I don't want to hit you over the head with all of this, but there would appear to be the need for an elaborate illustration here. That is, an illustration of the level of interest, involvement, and understanding of someone who was, at one time, an officer and board member of the Association of Boxing Commissions. It's necessary because this has to be considered a reflection on the group, which represents itself as one that is working in the best interests of boxing, and indeed seeks to establish as much authority as it possibly can toward the ostensible accomplishment of that end.

And for members of the media who may not know any better, it's important to shed light on the kind of people they are ascribing credibility to.

## KENTUCKY: FRIED Part 11 -- KERNS IS TOUGHMAN-TRAINED - AND IT SHOWS

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Friday, 11 July 2003 18:00

---

At the ABC's July 2001 convention, which was held in New Orleans, Jack Kerns, in the wake of his tragic mishandling of the Greg Page-Dale Crowe fight - a state of affairs which presumably was known to most ABC members - got himself elected to the position of First Vice-President of the organization, apparently with the support of outgoing ABC president Greg Sirb, who has since been campaigning for the job of federal boxing "czar".

At the very least, according to the transcript of the convention, Sirb did not voice an objection to the election of Kerns, despite the fact that he had expressed full awareness of Kerns' activities on an Easter Sunday edition of ESPN's "Outside the Lines" that explored the Page situation. Sirb himself was busy trying to gather support for his own election to the newly-created position of "Past President", which would allow him to continue holding a seat on the ABC board (for possible motivations that were detailed in the first "Operation Cleanup" book), and was in no position to be throwing away potential reciprocal votes.

Kerns won his election by just one vote - meaning it was Sirb's vote that could have actually made the difference - and it can be argued with a considerable degree of conviction that the presence of Kerns stripped away any plausible perception of credibility from the ABC.

But since he has refused to talk to the media since the Page tragedy, not until his actual testimony in the deposition does he reveal, for public consumption, (a) his true understanding of what his duties were at the ABC, (b) what, if any, participation he had in shaping ABC policy, (c) what, to his knowledge, was the basic function and purpose of the ABC.

For that reason, it is indeed very fortuitous that we can reference these legal documents.

The initial intention of Greg Page's attorney, Doug Morris, was to focus in on what approach the ABC, in their so-called "training" sessions, took toward the general safety of fighters, and whether those standards set an example that Kerns followed in the disposition of his own job in Kentucky.

"Q: Did any of those sessions involve safety issues related to fights?

A: You know, it's always our job to keep the boxers safe, if humanly possible, but it wasn't up to a judge. The judge could just judge what he seen.

Q: Yes, sir. I'm just asking if any of these seminars that - where these referees or judges came in, did any of those deal with any safety issues?

A: No, sir, just judgment calls where you had to make a decision right there. You know, who you think done this or whatever."

Kerns didn't get much training in this area from outside the ABC either:

"Q: Have you ever had at anytime any training related to safety matters connected with professional boxing?

## KENTUCKY: FRIED Part 11 -- KERNS IS TOUGHMAN-TRAINED - AND IT SHOWS

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Friday, 11 July 2003 18:00

---

A: No training, no, sir.

Q: How about amateur boxing? Have you ever undergone any training related to safety issues associated with amateur boxing?

A: No, sir.

Q: Is there anyone that's a member of the Kentucky Athletic Commission that's designated to have any particular responsibility for safety issues related to fights sanctioned by the Kentucky Athletic Commission?

A: I think that all the commissioners are when we have - if we have a bout, if there's anything that comes up and we've got to make a judgment call, the commissioners there would do that anytime there's a judgment call.

Q: So all the commissioners are equally responsible for seeing to it that the fights are carried off in a safe manner?

A: Whoever I would appoint would be there and we would work together. Yes, sir, they're responsible, too."

And speaking of being 'responsible':

"Q: What are the responsibilities of the vice president of the ABC?

A: Anything that the president would ask you to do, you would try to do.

Q: Who is the president?

A: Tim Luckenheimer.

Q: Can you spell that last name for me?

A: I can't spell it."

He can't say it either. I'll be perfectly honest with you - I don't know anyone by the name of "Tim Luckenheimer". I DO know that a gentleman named Tim LUCKENHOFF is the president of the Association of Boxing Commissions.

"Q: What is the function of the ABC?

A: Well, they're trying to get all the states to work together, like unified rules. They want everyone to fight - like some states have three knockdown rules, they want it so they'll have no knockdown rules. They want all the rules to be the same.

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Friday, 11 July 2003 18:00

---

Q: Have they accomplished that?

A: I would say they're doing pretty good. There might be some things that they want to do that they haven't got yet, but I couldn't really tell you what all their goals are."

Next, Morris explored the positive effects of Kerns' involvement, what he took from the ABC, and what he did to improve the rules in his own state or did to bring themselves into line with what was recommended as part of the "unified rules" of the ABC.

"Q: Has Kentucky changed any of its rules because of the ABC?

A: On the unified rules on a championship fight.

Q: They have?

A: Yes.

Q: When did they do that?

A: Now, you know, I say they have. They talked about it at the commission meeting, but whether it's really become law yet, I can't say that yes or no. But they have talked about it at the meetings and that's the way they want it to be done.

Q: So as a Kentucky athletic commissioner, you don't know if the boxing commission of the state of Kentucky has adopted the unified championship rules or not?

A: No. We've talked about different rules we want to change, but I don't think they went from the - what is it? The LRC or whatever it is.

Q: So they have not been adopted by the state of Kentucky?

A: Not to my knowledge."

Of course, Kerns knew what the REAL important stuff was.

"Q: In terms of presenting any rules changes to the Kentucky legislature, have you personally been involved in doing any of that?

A: Yeah. Yeah. We got some of them changed. We got - well, I say we - they got them changed. Like raising the salary for the judges and referees and things like that, that was changed, because they have to send it all the way down to Kentucky.

Q: When was that changed?

A: About two years ago.

## KENTUCKY: FRIED Part 11 -- KERNS IS TOUGHMAN-TRAINED - AND IT SHOWS

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---

Q: And what was your role in getting that done?

A: Just they called me in front of the senate, and you know, they had a committee, and they asked me questions, you know.

Q: Have you ever been involved in seeking any other rules changes other than increasing the salaries for judges and referees?

A: We've turned in different - we talked about it at the meeting about, you know, things we would like to be changed, but nothing has actually been done yet."

Kerns said that a condition for judges and referees to be licensed was to take a test and attend a seminar once a year.

"Q: Who conducted the seminars?

A: One of the commissioners - I had a fellow named Emmett Igo, he was one of them. I helped out. And we would bring such people in as Greg Sirp. He's the chairman for the state of Pennsylvania.

Q: What's his last name?

A: Sirp.

Q: S-e-r-p?

A: S-i-r-p."

I have no knowledge of a commissioner from Pennsylvania whose last name rhymes with "burp", though I readily admit, when I think of regulation in the Keystone State, I do occasionally belch.

To continue.....

"Q: Did any of those seminars deal with any safety issues?

A: Keep in mind that every time we had any kind of school or anything that was our first thought was safety for the fighters.

Q: So what did you do in these seminars from '95 until 2001 to address that first thought of safety? What courses, what materials did you cover?

A: Well, we didn't have any courses, but we would tell the referees, you know, you've got to watch, and you feel - if you think that a person is in danger, you stop that fight and let him fight another day."

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Unfortunately, Greg Page won't have that luxury.

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