

The 19th Round

People often complain that we're wallowing in far too much alphabet soup. OK - I'll buy that. But you've got to keep in mind that there's a major difference between various kinds of sanctioning bodies. I'm not talking about it in terms of credibility (that's another issue), but rather, in the fundamental ways in which they do business.

Let me try to illustrate this through a story culled from personal experience.

I was approached once with an offer to become the president of what would be considered a "minor" sanctioning body. We'll call it the XYZ. On the surface, it sounded pretty good - after all, I figured this might present an opportunity to establish a little credibility in the ratings system (at least as much as I could), and to demonstrate that some "clean" business could be conducted for a change within the sordid structure of boxing at the championship level. Oh, and I almost forgot - to travel to some exotic places too.

As the conversation progressed, I inquired as to what this job entailed. The answer, coming from the guy who basically "owned" the organization, was that "you've got to get us some XYZ title fights", which meant, in essence, that it was a matter of contacting various promoters with the intention of "selling" title fights to them.

So what it really amounted to was a sales job. In fact, one that paid a commission.

And of course, with a situation like that, it naturally occurs to you - the difference between, say, one of the "off-board" sanctioning bodies and the four that can be considered majors - the WBC, WBA, IBF and WBO - is that if you are running one of the majors, promoters are pitching YOU to out on title fights, whereas if you're with one of the "minors", YOU are pitching THEM.

If you understand boxing, that difference is HUGE.

Why?

Because in the latter scenario, you are going to making concessions to promoters on a continuing basis. Because your championship does not bring with it the "respect" that comes with a "major" title, you are in a position where you need THEM more than they need YOU. The promoter gives the sanctioning body credibility, much more than the other way around. In point of fact, the cooperation of a promoter is NECESSARY for the fledgling organization to make any strides at all. That constitutes a degree of DEPENDENCE that is considerably greater than the majors feel toward anybody, regardless of what your ideas are about payoffs and kickbacks.

As a result, the minor sanctioning body is going to bend over backwards even more than usual - and very cheerfully, I might add - to accommodate those promoters who have been "helpful",

MAJOR OR MINOR - IT'S STILL A SANCTIONING BODY

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in the way of doing fight that generate sanctioning fees. This would include rating certain fighters favorably, or bending the rules in such a way that it would put the "friendly" promoter's fighter in a position to fight for a title.

After all, if you're a sanctioning body without any real clout, what kind of fighters are going to be rated more favorably - those fighters you DON'T have access to, or those fighters you DO have access to, handled by a promoter who is willing to scratch your back if you scratch his?

So when one of these "favored" promoter gets their hooks in such an organization, they're likely to go down a slippery slope in terms of their capacity to say "no".

Does all this sound horrible and corrupt? Well, if it were a much bigger sanctioning organization that was accorded a greater degree of credibility, or one that is attached to or supported by a television network, the practice would probably be considered a lot more egregious. As it is, it's just kind of hokey - not to be taken even semi-seriously. When you come to grips with the fact that the "governing bodies" are a business just like anything else, you realize that it's simply a matter of financial survival.

Of course, since Section 11 of the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act requires sanctioning bodies to explain their ratings, if asked, I'm going to be assume that goes for ALL sanctioning bodies, regardless of how big they are. A set of championship rules is also supposed to be on file with the Federal Trade Commission and/or the Association of Boxing Commissions.

If that's the case, I wonder how some of these organizations can stand up to scrutiny.

An ideal example of this is the International Boxing Council (IBC), an organization that was founded by people like Marty Cohen about 15 years ago, subsequently operated by the late former manager and Ohio commissioner, Blackie Gennaro, and is now run by his son. The last available ratings on the IBC website are from September 2002 (I guess that, in and of itself, is an Ali Act violation, isn't it?).

In those September ratings, the IBC listed seven champions. And five of them were from Denmark - heavyweight Brian Nielsen, super cruiserweight Tue Bjorn Thomson, welterweight Thomas Damgaard, lightweight Dennis Holbaek Pedersen, and bantamweight Johnny Bredahl. There were also an abundance of Danish fighters rated in various divisions - Mads Larsen was the #1 super middleweight, Mikkel Kessler was #10 in the same division, Steffan Nielsen was #10 at heavyweight, Mikael Rask was listed #7 at junior middleweight, Rudy Markussen was tenth at light heavy, Steffan Norskov was the #3 flyweight, and Spend Arazi checked in at #10 in the featherweight class.

Not to say these Danish fighters were not capable. But they had one overriding thing in common - they were all managed by either Mogens Palle or his daughter, Bettina Palle. Basically, they were handled by both.

Since those last ratings were posted, three of the Palle's fighters won IBC titles. Abazi won the vacant 126-pound crown on September 13 over Giovanni Andrade, who was NOT rated in the

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IBC's Top 10. Norskov won the vacant flyweight belt on October 4 with a sixth-round TKO over Dominick Guillen, who was NOT rated in the IBC's Top 10 in September. And Rask captured the vacant junior middleweight title on October 25 with a decision over Alfredo Mosquera, another fighter who was NOT in the latest IBC ratings.

This gave the Palles eight "world champions" out of the ten crowned by the IBC. Think it's because they were one of the few entities willing to do business with the IBC?

Brian Nielsen had beaten Troy Weida for the vacant title in January of 2000. Honestly, I don't know if Weida was rated in the IBC's Top 10 at the time, but if he was, he was misplaced - Weida had to that date beaten only one fighter with ten pro fights a winning record. After losing to Nielsen, Weida went on to be knocked out in one round by Rob Calloway, Dale Crowe, Ray Mercer, and Tino Hoffmann. And he just recently lost to clubfighter Russell Chasteen in a bid for a WBF Intercontinental title.

The biggest joke of all was in the IBC's September cruiserweight ratings. Argentina's Dario Matteoni, a former world contender with a 41-2-1 career record, was listed as the #1 contender for that vacant title. The problem is, Matteoni is 42 years old and hadn't fought since May of 2001. And in that particular fight, he scored an eighth-round TKO over Perfecto Gonzalez, who had come to Argentina billing himself as Uriah Grant, but who in fact had an 0-9 record with nine KO losses, one of them, ironically, suffered at the hands of Grant.

I doubt the organization followed any rules at all when it came to the process by which they were to fill these titles, or whether there are rules governing this process at all, as would seem to be prescribed in the Ali Act. If they didn't, isn't this something that should be examined by those eager beavers in the ABC?

Oh, incidentally - in the way of disclaimer, I should mention that I was involved with the management of an IBC champion, Robert Daniels, who beat Kenny Keene to win the vacant cruiserweight crown in March of 1997. Things were slightly different then - Blackie Gennaro was still alive and running the organization. Daniels was, at the time, a rated contender by the IBC.

Well, at least I'm relatively sure of it.

Frankly, I wasn't paying all that much attention.

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