

## THE INSTANT SANCTIONING BODY

Written by Charles Jay  
Friday, 17 January 2003 18:00

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### The 20th Round

Hey - would you like to be a mover and shaker in the world of boxing? Controlling world ratings? Pulling the strings on world championship fights? "Continental" championship fights? "Americas" championship fights? Or, if you really want to get fancy, "Continental Americas" championship fights? AND be a world traveler to boot?

Wouldn't you like to be able to flip a switch and exert influence on the natural order of things in boxing? Would it be an adrenaline rush to have the Kings, Arums, Kushners, Warrens, and Kohls licking your boots?

Well, I don't know what you're waiting for.

All you have to do is start a sanctioning body and take it from there.

Tom Mishou, the Georgia commission administrator who has something called the International Boxing Union headquartered in his state, says, "All you need, I guess, is to incorporate and you can call yourself a sanctioning body."

You don't even have to go THAT far.

Let me show you how easy it is. After class, I'll even sell you the complete startup kit (it's a mere \$34.95).

Our story begins in May of 1994. At the time I was working with a partner, Steve Benson, and we had a company called Whirlwind Entertainment that was getting ready to promote a June 6 boxing show at Casino Magic in Mississippi as part of a multi-fight deal we had just signed.

These shows were low-budget, which appealed to the casino. Nonetheless, we felt it incumbent upon ourselves to make at least a small splash, inasmuch as names like Larry Holmes, Roberto Duran, Oscar De la Hoya, and Roy Jones had fought at the property the year before, when I served as the boxing consultant.

If we could get someone with a name to fight for chump change, and promote it as some kind of title fight, it would help our cause in this first show out of the box.

We knew it would be nice to have a former heavyweight champion, and there were several around at the time who would have fit our needs - people like Tim Witherspoon, Trevor Berbick, Tony Tubbs.

The guy we finally settled on was former WBA champ Mike Weaver, for a couple of important reasons - one, we were promoting this as "D-Day at the Bay", and he was an ex-Marine, and

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two, because he held the heavyweight title of the National Boxing Association (NBA) - not to be confused with the National Boxing Association that the WBA grew out of, but a rather new organization that was run by a gentleman I knew in Florida named Irv Abramson.

We got in touch with Don Manuel, who was managing Weaver, and struck a deal rather quickly. Somebody we knew had the bright idea that this fight, which we were producing for an independent television broadcast, could be sold to hospitality outlets across the country along a Hispanic bar network via closed circuit hookup. But we would have to have Latins in our main events, preferably Mexicans.

Weaver's name value satisfied the Casino Magic people. Now, to accommodate the TV "gurus" we had met, we set out to insert a Mexican heavyweight as an opponent.

Well, you didn't exactly have to do a Google search to find one, because there were only a few of them out there. Most readily available was Ladislao Mijangos, whose claim to fame was a one-round KO of Jimmy Ellis (not the former heavyweight champ but the ordinary Idaho native), who himself had knocked out Tony Tubbs in one round a year before.

Mijangos brought a 23-16 record with him, and he really couldn't fight. But he was Mexican. So we had a match, for Weaver's NBA title.

At least that's what we thought.

As my partner was addressing the sanctioning details, up stepped Abramson. On May 20, he sent a fax with the sanctioning application, in which he had filled in the fees. The sanctioning fee he was demanding was \$3500.

**THIRTY-FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS!**

Well, there were no set standard sanctioning fees that we knew of, and in those days there certainly were no websites that were going to feed us this kind of information. But to give you an idea of how ridiculous this was, right now the International Boxing Federation, for example, charges promoters a base fee of \$3500 for its title fights (plus 3% of the fighters' purses). And there is no argument about the fact that the IBF carries real weight, while the NBA didn't.

Furthermore, to the best of my recollection (don't make me go into storage to find the contracts), we were paying Weaver \$10,000 and Mijangos \$3500. That's \$13,500 total, meaning that it was equal to a whopping 26% of the main event purses, not to mention 12% of the site fee we were getting.

Over the next few days, I sat down to review these numbers with Benson. And I came to the conclusion that it might not make any sense to go with the NBA sanction. To be honest, I was expecting to pay something in the neighborhood of \$1500, including the supervisor's fee. Anything more than that would be out of the question.

We started thinking about alternative scenarios, including creating a title from scratch. In the

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meantime, Benson kept going back and forth with Abramson over the sanctioning fee. And Abramson was not budging.

On May 25, Abramson sent another fax, asking us to send back the application, along with the fees. Benson called him to reiterate that the sanctioning fee was somewhat high, at the same time still hoping to reach some kind of accord.

Well, a couple of days later David Hilbert, the entertainment director for the casino and our boxing liaison there, called us. It seems Abramson had sent the following letter to him:

Dear Mr. Hilbert,

Due to a breakdown in communications with promoter Steve Benson and Whirlwind Entertainment Group Inc., we hereby remove any and all sanctions by the National Boxing Association of the scheduled June 6th, 12-round bout between Mike Weaver and Ladislao Mijangos, as a world championship bout.

Please cease and desist any and all references, promotions and publicity relating to the National Boxing Association as the sanctioning body. This is not an NBA sanctioned championship bout.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter by Fax or return mail.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Irv Abramson

President and Chief Executive Officer

It was copied to Billy Lyons, head of the Mississippi State Athletic Commission.

Of course, there was no reference in the letter, nor had there been any in conversations with Benson, about Mijangos not being in the NBA ratings, or being unsuitable as a "championship opponent". Abramson was willing to bypass those ratings issues, so long as he got his money. And as he didn't think he was going to get it, he was going to try and scare somebody.

At that point it was a good thing that (a) we had a healthy relationship with the casino (at least we did then), and (b) that no one there had ever heard of the National Boxing Association to begin with. Otherwise, Abramson's attempt to sabotage the fight card may have hurt us very badly.

Naturally, there was an easy decision to make - I figured that since the NBA wasn't well-recognized or well-respected, it wouldn't make much difference if there were another minor sanctioning body willing to work with us. And really, from there my rationale became, why pay

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any sanctioning fees at all? Why not start our own organization out of thin air? Who would really care?

So that's what we decided to do. But we had only about 10 days to go until the fight, so we really had to swing into action.

Benson quickly designed a logo for the new "organization" on his computer. He had another company called "Florida Boxing Authority", so we decided to call this the "International Boxing Authority". He put the logo on a disk, sent it to the belt maker in New Jersey, and we had an IBA championship belt within days.

Any of our promotional materials that mentioned the NBA were simply changed to read "IBA".

We informed Weaver that he was now the IBA's heavyweight champion of the world, and let Mijangos' agent know that his man was now fighting for a different belt. It didn't seem to matter to either of them.

In the 48 hours before the fight was to take place, I went to work drafting a constitution and a set of championship rules and regulations for the International Boxing Authority. All of it was loosely based on what I had compiled for the Universal Boxing Association (where I was ratings chairman) six or seven years before.

Then I put together the "official" IBA world ratings. I had included a provision in the rules that allowed anyone in the Top 20 to fight for a world title. Mijangos was conveniently installed as the #19 heavyweight contender. My ratings committee consisted of whoever happened to drift into my hotel suite during this time.

When we were finished, we made sure we put all of this in the hands of the Mississippi State Athletic Commission. To be honest, I don't think we even created a corporation for the IBA.

We also recruited a lawyer we knew in Boca Raton to be our IBA "president". We flew him to the fight on about a day's notice, ostensibly to "supervise" the proceedings. We sat him in the front row, right near the owner of the casino and right behind Billy Lyons.

It was just like the real thing.

And I'll tell you what - when our ring announcer, Mark Beiro, blurted out that this fight was for the "IBA heavyweight championship of the world", no one questioned what we were doing, no one laughed, no one asked "what happened to the NBA?", no one asked for their money back, and no one avoided the blackjack tables after the fight because of it. In fact, to the unsuspecting observer, this was the first heavyweight title fight in the state of Mississippi since 1889, when John L. Sullivan KO'd Jake Kilrain in 75 rounds for the bare knuckle crown!

From what I can recollect, no one from the commission batted an eye. We even used their judges.

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And our belt looked much nicer than the NBA's.

As for the fight itself, it wasn't much. Weaver stopped Mijangos in the second round of an uneventful affair.

In doing so, he retained his IBA title.

Of course, that was neither here nor there, because the IBA faded into memory. We didn't need to use it again. Weaver was not the worse for it. Abramson never stripped him, so he went on to make two more NBA title defenses and Abramson collected two more sanctioning fees.

The point of all this is, we were able to start an organization and create a title - just like that. If we did it, others can do the same. Just like that.

So when you see those "title fights" from people like the IBO, IBC, WBF, IBU, WBU, etc., you'll take note that it doesn't require a rocket scientist, or any degree of organization, to be able to step forward and call somebody a "world champion". All it takes is the desire to do it and a little sense of humor.

And when you see something called the "IBA" - another ersatz group promoting out there on the ESPN telecasts, please remember - that ain't us.

No - we're the ones who had "credibility".

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