The 31st Round

The Association of Boxing Commissions strengthened itself considerably in the last week,though it wasn't a result of anything it did pro-actively. One of its board members, Kentucky Athletic Commission chairman Jack Kerns, a man who has consciously put the livesof fighters in danger by ignoring federal standards, has been fired from his job byKentucky governor Paul Patton, who despite his own recent embroglios has done his gooddeed for the year.

Kerns is off the ABC board because if someone does not sit on, or work for, a boxingcommission, he/she can not maintain a position on that board.

Many are sorry to see him go, including, I'm sure, Greg Sirb, the Pennsylvaniacommission's executive director who has allowed underage fighters to enter the ring inviolation of his state's laws, who has lent support to Kentucky's "Minister ofMaim" in the past, and who has come to count on Kerns' support as well.

Many people I have talked to refer to Kerns as a "personable guy", although whenyou look at his deeds, which include scheming his way onto the ABC board as a cheap publicrelations ploy after what may well have been criminal negligence on his part in almostkilling Greg Page, how can he be described as anything other than a low-life?

Someone told me there was an official press release about Kerns' firing from the governor,though I haven't seen it. As I'm typing this, only today has his name been removed fromthe commission's official website, with Michael Cunningham (ironically, the referee forthe Greg Page-Dale Crowe fight) listed as the new chair. And frankly, I haven't exactlybeen motivated to flood the governor's office looking for an explanation about the wholething - not that I would get the whole truth anyway.

But I can have theories, can't I?

On Friday morning, Patricia Page, the wife of Greg Page, was at the Civic Center in thestate capital of Frankfurt for a "legislative breakfast", attending with a groupthat advocates for benefits on behalf of disability patients (of which the formerheavyweight champ is included). At the conclusion, she grabbed Ben Chandler, the state'sattorney general and son of the former governor, and pulled him over to the side.

Holding back as much anger as she could, she recounted the whole incident surrounding herhusband, detailing the malfeasance of a state appointee (Kerns) in it. She stressed thatthere was absolute knowledge on Kerns' part as to the absence of a stretcher, anambulance, or a licensed physician, before allowing Page, and all the other fighters, toget into the ring on March 9, 2001 in Erlanger - in effect skirting standards set forth infederal law.

Chandler looked puzzled. "That was the first he'd heard about what happened to GregPage", says Patricia. Perhaps that shouldn't be so surprising, considering that theattorney general's office also didn't know very much about the alleged internal"investigation" that was going on within the Kentucky Athletic Commission, aninvestigation that in fact went on virtually without witnesses.

Of course, that's interesting, because Kentucky is one of those states where the attorneygeneral supplies dedicated counsel to the boxing commission. Greg Page is in the processof suing the commission members individually, where Chandler's office may or may notbecome directly involved.

Anyway, Chandler, who agreed that federal laws should have superseded his own state's law,and who has designs on winning Kentucky's next gubernatorial election, promised Mrs. Pagehe was going to look into it. "I'll make it a major priority", is what he toldher. Just to make sure, Patricia went over to Chandler's office at the state capitolbuilding and reminded someone over there that she'd be following up. All this happened atabout 9 o'clock in the morning. By the afternoon, Kerns had been fired.

Coincidence? Maybe. I'm not sure I really care. What matters is that Kerns is gone.

Of course, the job isn't over yet.

The next person who needs to be flushed down the toilet is Nancy Black, the commission'sexecutive director, who should have been fired but wasn't, and who is emblematic of what Iregret to report is a frightening trend among state-level boxing regulators - people whoare completely clueless about the business they are overseeing, and similarly apatheticABOUT that cluelessness. That became crystal clear when it was revealed after the Pageincident that despite her appointed position, she had never attended a fight card in herlife. And as you'll realize by reading subsequent installments of "Operation Cleanup2", the very fact that she has been in charge of this state agency is both dangerousand absurd.

Meanwhile, Patricia Page has gotten herself involved in formulating a boxing reform billthat was introduced by her state representative, Reginald Meeks, and which will hopefullyreceive passage in the state assembly sometime during this session.

The bill will establish certain minimum standards for medical testing, insurance, physicalexaminations, qualifications for doctors, drug testing, HIV testing, and various in-ringsafety measures, which may in some cases exceed even those that are required by theProfessional Boxer Safety Act ("Operation Cleanup" has been helpful whereverpossible). Of course, it might also be worthwhile to explore having minimum requirementsfor the people who are going to ENFORCE this law as well.

In nothing else, the bill, should it become law, will create some awareness that eventhough the sport of boxing may be an afterthought in the state of Kentucky, the safety ofthose who participate in it shouldn't be.

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