

WHATEVER THE REASON, WE'RE GLAD KERNS IS GONE

Written by Charles Jay

Tuesday, 11 February 2003 18:00

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 lives of fighters in danger by ignoring federal standards, has been fired from his job by Kentucky governor Paul Patton, who despite his own recent embroglios has done his good deed for the year.

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

Many are sorry to see him go, including, I'm sure, Greg Sirb, the Pennsylvania commission's executive director who has allowed underage fighters to enter the ring in violation of his state's laws, who has lent support to Kentucky's "Minister of Maim" 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 when you look at his deeds, which include scheming his way onto the ABC board as a cheap public relations ploy after what may well have been criminal negligence on his part in almost killing 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 from the commission's official website, with Michael Cunningham (ironically, the referee for the Greg Page-Dale Crowe fight) listed as the new chair. And frankly, I haven't exactly been motivated to flood the governor's office looking for an explanation about the whole thing - 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 the state capital of Frankfurt for a "legislative breakfast", attending with a group that advocates for benefits on behalf of disability patients (of which the former heavyweight champ is included). At the conclusion, she grabbed Ben Chandler, the state's attorney 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 her husband, detailing the malfeasance of a state appointee (Kerns) in it. She stressed that there was absolute knowledge on Kerns' part as to the absence of a stretcher, an ambulance, or a licensed physician, before allowing Page, and all the other fighters, to get into the ring on March 9, 2001 in Erlanger - in effect skirting standards set forth in federal law.

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

Of course, that's interesting, because Kentucky is one of those states where the attorney general supplies dedicated counsel to the boxing commission. Greg Page is in the process of suing the commission members individually, where Chandler's office may or may not become 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. Page he was going to look into it. "I'll make it a major priority", is what he told her. Just to make sure, Patricia went over to Chandler's office at the state capitol building and reminded someone over there that she'd be following up. All this happened at about 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's executive director, who should have been fired but wasn't, and who is emblematic of what I regret to report is a frightening trend among state-level boxing regulators - people who are completely clueless about the business they are overseeing, and similarly apathetic ABOUT that cluelessness. That became crystal clear when it was revealed after the Page incident that despite her appointed position, she had never attended a fight card in her life. And as you'll realize by reading subsequent installments of "Operation Cleanup 2", the very fact that she has been in charge of this state agency is both dangerous and absurd.

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

The bill will establish certain minimum standards for medical testing, insurance, physical examinations, qualifications for doctors, drug testing, HIV testing, and various in-ring safety measures, which may in some cases exceed even those that are required by the Professional Boxer Safety Act ("Operation Cleanup" has been helpful wherever possible). Of course, it might also be worthwhile to explore having minimum requirements for 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 even though the sport of boxing may be an afterthought in the state of Kentucky, the safety of those who participate in it shouldn't be.

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