

DOING THE TENNESSEE WALTZ

Written by Charles Jay
Thursday, 20 February 2003 18:00

The 33rd Round

As I write this, it looks as if Mike Tyson and Clifford Etienne will indeed tangle Saturday night.

For a little while there, it looked like they weren't.

During that period of time, Tommy Patrick, who heads up what passes for a commission in the state of Tennessee, was hot as a firecracker.

It was his intention, if Tyson don't through with his scheduled bout, to place the former heavyweight champion on an "administrative suspension" for breaching an agreement to fight, with the objective of having that suspension honored by all over commissions in the country.

Administrative suspensions are a little dicey, because they are not issued for medical reasons. If a commission wishes to allow a fighter under this type of suspension to compete within their jurisdiction, it is required to notify the suspending commission, but it has absolutely no obligation to honor the suspension.

So, to get the other commissions behind him, Patrick would probably have had to receive the support of the Association of Boxing Commissions, to which nearly all boxing commissions in the United States belong.

Of course, there was a fat chance of that happening. If you recall, the guys who usually do the speaking for the ABC - people like Tim Lueckenhoff and Greg Sirb - were very vocal about not wanting Tyson to fight ANYWHERE, for reasons that they didn't really know, but which sounded good to some sportswriters, in the wake of the Nevada State Athletic Commission refusing to license Tyson for his fight against Lennox Lewis.

Many states went along with them, but Tennessee, and Patrick, most decidedly did not. I would doubt whether the ABC members, en masse, would have volunteered support for the Volunteer State, if it were based solely on its request for reciprocity, although it maybe a consolation to Patrick that the ABC guys could probably drum up enough hatred for Tyson without any external prompting.

What Patrick would have based this suspension on, I imagine, is breach of contract. But WHICH contract?

You see, they have a problem down there in Tennessee - a problem that, I trust, exists at many commissions in this country. The regulations in Tennessee simply require the commission to have bout contracts registered with them. And they certainly don't require that ALL the contracts related to a fight be on file on them.

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This situation came into focus during the buildup leading to the Lewis-Tyson fight, which was also held in Tennessee. A few writers, including Thomas Hauser of SecondsOut, illustrated that there were so many contracts connected to the fight that one would be hard-pressed to keep up with all of them, and no commission the caliber of Tennessee's could possibly know enough to have all those contracts on file.

Indeed, in the process of researching a story for "Operation Cleanup", I endeavored to find out some details of a fight on the Lewis-Tyson undercard. The commission representative I spoke with not only could not tell me what the purses were for the fight in question, she told me the commission did not even have a copy of the bout contracts on file.

Really, is that any way to run a boxing commission? What would happen if a fighter got stiffed, or shorted on his money? What recourse would any fighter have? And on what basis would the commission take any disciplinary action at all against a promoter if that situation arose? I couldn't imagine how Tommy Patrick's attempts at an "administrative suspension" could be met with anything but laughter from his ABC "brethren".

I could actually argue that it's not only advisable, but MANDATORY for the commission to have all the available documentation. I just have to point to Section 13 of the Ali Act:

"SEC. 13. REQUIRED DISCLOSURES FOR PROMOTERS.

`(a) DISCLOSURES TO THE BOXING COMMISSIONS- A promoter shall not be entitled to receive any compensation directly or indirectly in connection with a boxing match until it provides to the boxing commission responsible for regulating the match in a State a statement of--

`(1) a copy of any agreement in writing to which the promoter is a party with any boxer participating in the match;

`(2) a statement made under penalty of perjury that there are no other agreements, written or oral, between the promoter and the boxer with respect to that match; and

`(3)(A) all fees, charges, and expenses that will be assessed by or through the promoter on the boxer pertaining to the event, including any portion of the boxer's purse that the promoter will receive, and training expenses"

Funny thing is, what I found out, not from anyone in Tennessee but from another, more reliable source, is that the contracts from June 8 - whichever contracts Tennessee knew enough to get - didn't go into their file (Xerox machines apparently don't exist in Knoxville), but were sent directly to the ABC, which brings them under the protection of Section 15 of the Ali Act, regarding "Confidentiality", meaning they don't have to be shown to anyone at all "except to the extent required in a legal, administrative, or judicial proceeding".

When are these commissions going to learn anything?

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