

Written by Charles Jay
Monday, 24 February 2003 18:00

The 36th Round

I have no particular problem with Norman Stone sharing the Boxing Writers Association of America (BWAA) award for Manager of the Year. But I do have a little difficulty with the co-recipient of that award, who, as it turns out, is Klaus-Peter Kohl of Germany, who handles the heavyweight Klitschko brothers, WBO light heavyweight champion Dariusz Michalczewski, and former cruiserweight champ Juan Carlos Gomez.

You see, that's because Kohl isn't a manager - he is a PROMOTER.

Well, at least he's principally a promoter. And in all his press materials, he refers to himself as a promoter. His managerial "duties" are really a by-product of what he does as a promoter - which is to say that he wants nothing less than complete control of his fighters. In effect, as a promoter he is negotiating with himself.

Actually, there's nothing to prevent that from happening in Germany, where Kohl operates a company called Universum. But that's not the case in America. And after all, this is the Boxing Writers Association of AMERICA, isn't it?

It just illustrates - seemingly the line has indeed blurred between manager and promoter to the point where those who fancy themselves from time to time as "moral guardians" of the sport would seem rather indifferent to it.

We've covered - very extensively - the reason why there should be a distinction between a manager and promoter; that is, for the people who even wanted to bother doing their homework.

Let me - one more time - take an excerpt from Chapter 51 of "Operation Cleanup", as it referred to what was then (August of last year) pending litigation between the John Ruiz camp (which ironically included "Manager of the Year" Stone), and Don King, regarding King's "obligations" to Ruiz:

"King has one overriding obligation to Ruiz - to deliver a specified number of fights at a fee that is (a) subject to negotiation, and (b) not below a pre-determined minimum price..

It is not necessarily to "advise" Ruiz, or to act in the fighter's best interests, at least to where it is to the exclusion of his own, or even to the exclusion of other heavyweights he may do business with.

Ruiz' lawyer and co-manager, Tony Cardinale, has a fiduciary duty to the fighter.

Norman Stone, the other co-manager, has a fiduciary duty to the fighter.

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Don King does NOT have a fiduciary duty to the fighter. He simply has a CONTRACTUAL relationship with him.

King is not Ruiz' manager - in fact, in many ways, his function is actually AT ODDS with that of the managers of Ruiz.

You see, the obligation of Stone and Cardinale is to secure, for their fighter, the best price possible with the promoter, who happens to be King. That creates, by definition, an adversarial relationship - not in the sense that they are enemies, but hopefully - ideally - in the healthiest sense possible, in that they are both negotiating in good faith with each other, with each having objectives that are not necessarily mutually inclusive of each other.

For example, if King wants Ruiz to fight "Fighter X", and offers \$1 million to Ruiz, and Stone and Cardinale come back and they want \$2 million, they will negotiate back and forth over the figure, until a deal is made in which both parties are satisfied. The less Ruiz takes, the more money King will make, at least theoretically. Likewise, the more money Ruiz is able to negotiate for himself, the LESS money King will make."

Likewise, as it applies to our current subject, the level of success of Kohl, the PROMOTER, is actually predicated on how little Kohl the MANAGER is willing to accept in the way of purses on behalf of his fighters. That's because there is invariably a difference between what the fighters get paid and what Kohl is paid, especially when they fight on someone else's card, as they have here in the U.S. You can put whatever tag on it you want - "promotional rights" or "side money". I can assure you that whatever money Kohl is taking, he's doing it as a PROMOTER. And if he's also taking a percentage as a MANAGER, well, there's a term for that too: "double-dipping".

Isn't that the basis upon which many of the BWAA members have vilified Don King for years?

It sounds absurd, but it's absolutely true. And what is just as absurd is that someone like that would be considered for a manager's award.

Look - there isn't a boxing writer alive who needs to tell me anything about the realities of the boxing industry. Since I've actually been IN the industry, I probably have more awareness of those realities than all of them combined. I acknowledge that managers have edged toward extinction in this day and age. But guess what - that's exactly the point.

To me, a true "Manager of the Year" candidate is someone who has survived, thrived, and maintained at least some degree of independence of action, and duty to his client, as a manager in a sport completely dominated by the network, the promoter, or the network/promoter, if you will. Stone can fit that description. Kohl most decidedly does not.

The "Manager of the Year" award should be a celebration of the role of the manager, not a validation of the deterioration of that role.

If we're talking about an organization that aspires to high-minded principles, certainly one of those principles has to be the idea that a fighter should be represented by a manager, who

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negotiates the best possible purse with a promoter. Period.

But that apparently goes unrecognized, which is sad. Oh by the way, their "Trainer of the Year" is Buddy McGirt, who is primarily under contract not to fighters, or their managers, but to a promoter. We covered that rather comprehensively in the 18th Round of "Operation Cleanup 2".

And last year's recipient for "excellence in broadcast journalism" was a guy named Atlas.

Maybe that explains some of it. And perhaps another part of the reason resides in the BWAA membership itself. Simply put, there are a lot of people in the BWAA who don't write about boxing. Sure, the organization has its fair share of beat writers from major newspapers, as well as a handful of respected internet journalists.

But there are also quite a few members who either work for promoters, or who are commonly available to be hired by promoters, whether it be for public relations work or other duties. Therefore, it wouldn't be too surprising if these folks had a tendency to see things from a promoter's point of view, would it?

And so I guess that's how we wind up seeing a promoter winning "Manager of the Year".

Oh, what the hell - we don't even know who the real boxing writers ARE anymore.

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