

WBO BASHERS HAVE FORGOTTEN THE MOST IMPORTANT RULE OF ALL

Written by Charles Jay
Wednesday, 26 March 2003 18:00

The 46th Round

Here is an official statement from the WBO concerning the protest of David Tua, who wished to be considered "available" to challenge new WBO heavyweight champion Corrie Sanders:

"After careful consideration the World Boxing Organization has denied Team Tua's petition to be considered available to fight WBO Heavyweight Champion Corrie Sanders, while at the same time taking part in an IBF sanctioned elimination bout to choose the mandatory challenger for International Boxing Federation titlist and former WBO Champion Chris Byrd.

According to the WBO Regulations of World Championship Contests, newly crowned Heavyweight Champion Corrie Sanders must defend his title against the best available contender no later than 120 days from the date he won the Championship. Therefore, the bout must take place no later than July 4, 2003. This is due to the fact that Sanders was not the mandatory challenger when he dethroned then Champion Wladimir Klitschko on March 8, 2003 in Hamburg Germany. Klitschko had fulfilled his mandatory obligation when he defeated number one ranked heavyweight Jameel Ben McCline on December 7, 2002.

David Tua was number one in the WBO Monthly Rankings at the time of Sander's victory over Klitschko. He was unavailable to fight for the WBO Heavyweight Title, however, because he was already contracted to face Hasim Rahman in an International Boxing Federation sanctioned elimination bout to be held on March 29, 2003. The winner would then meet IBF Champion Chris Byrd.

The World Boxing Organization cannot freeze its proceedings pending the outcome of the Tua vs. Rahman bout. If Tua wins, and decides to face WBO Champion Sanders, it would take him considerable time to rest and recover from his bout with Rahman and then prepare to face Sanders, thus not complying with the July 4 deadline set by the WBO Rules. If Rahman wins, Tua would lose his position in the rankings and with it the opportunity to face Sanders. It was therefore decided that number two ranked Lamon Brewster was the best available contender to face Sanders in the required time. After contacting all parties involved, a purse bid was announced, as requested by representatives of Champion Corrie Sander and challenger Lamon Brewster. The bid will take place March 28, 2003 at The Crown Plaza Hotel in Hamburg Germany.

Team Tua promoter Cedrik Kushner claimed he was unable to contact WBO President Francisco Valcárcel the week of March 14 to discuss this matter. Yet, even though Valcárcel was in Chicago, Illinois, supervising the bout between WBO Champion Acelino Freitas and challenger Juan Carlos Ramirez, he was in contact with the WBO main offices and could also be reached via his hotel or his cell phone.

"We believe Tua is one of the best heavyweights out there and would like for him to fight for the

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WBO Title," stated Valcárcel, "But the WBO Rules are clear in this matter. Sanders must face the best available contender before July 4, 2003."

As for the comments made by Tua's co-manager, Martin Pugh, as to their intention of taking legal action to force the WBO into declaring Tua available to fight Sanders, the WBO President said, "As a practicing attorney in state and federal court for over 28 years, I recognize their right to go to court, but we must uphold the WBO bylaws and play by the rules."

The winning bid for the Corrie Sanders-Lamon Brewster WBO Heavyweight Championship Contest will be announced March 28, 2003."

Following the WBO's announcement, this press release came from the camp of David Tua:

TEAM TUA PLEADS ITS CASE AGAINST WBO TO SENATOR McCAIN

NEW YORK, NY (March 26, 2003) – Cedric Kushner has personally requested Senator John McCain to investigate the World Boxing Organization's (WBO) exclusion of it's No. 1-rated heavyweight contender, DAVID TUA, from negotiating for a mandatory challenge against WBO heavyweight champion, Corrie Sanders. Kushner is Tua's promoter.

"Something is not Kosher with the way the WBO is giving David Tua the bum's rush," said Martin Pugh, Tua's co-manager. "That is why Cedric went to a higher authority – Senator McCain."

The WBO ordered its new heavyweight champion Sanders to defend his title within 120 days of "acquisition of the title, against the Best Classified Contender Available." The problem is, the WBO is violating its own rules by ignoring its "Best Classified Contender Available" -- WBO No. 1 contender Tua. Instead, the WBO has decided that second-best is good enough – Lamon Brewster, the WBO's, No. 2-rated contender.

The WBO released a statement yesterday, which included the following: "The World Boxing Organization cannot freeze its proceedings pending the outcome of the Tua vs. Rahman bout. If Tua wins, and decides to face WBO Champion Sanders, it would take him considerable time to rest and recover from his bout with Rahman and then prepare to face Sanders, thus not complying with the July 4 deadline set by the WBO Rules."

"Now the WBO has added fortune telling to its purvey," countered Pugh. "Who are they to predetermine what David's condition will be BEFORE he fights Rahman?!!!"

"The WBO declared Tua unavailable without any formal notice to him, his management or his promoter. Tua is available to negotiate and has always been available to negotiate. If Tua is the No. 1 contender and he's available to negotiate, I think it is safe to say Tua is the 'Best Classified Contender Available.'"

Tua is scheduled to fight Hasim Rahman, at the First Union Spectrum in Philadelphia, PA, March 29. The fight will be televised on HBO's "World Championship Boxing," beginning at 10

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P.M. EST / 7 P.M. PST.

On March 18, Luis Batista Salas, Chairman of the WBO Championship Committee, stated in a letter to Rodney Berman, Sanders' promoter, "We cannot await the results of this [Tua vs Rahman] for considerations of any sort but a Rahman win would not place him in the number one position. The Championship Committee has thus designated now ranked #2 Lamon Brewster for Corrie Sanders next title defense..."

"Salas states in his letter that a Rahman win would not get him rated No. 1, but what Salas conveniently omits is, that if Tua wins, Tua REMAINS the WBO No. 1 contender," said Pugh.

Salas closed the letter stating that the promoters of the two fighters, Berman and Don King [Brewster's promoter] "Must inform WBO if they wish to negotiate within a 30-day period or go to an immediate Purse Bid."

On March 19, Dana Jamison, an executive of Don King Productions, faxed a letter to Mr. Salas of the WBO requesting an immediate purse bid. Later that same day, the WBO issued a Notice of Purse Bid, scheduled for March 28 in Hamburg, Germany.

"THIRTY DAYS to negotiate," continued Pugh. "If the WBO can wait 30 days to negotiate the fight what is the harm in waiting one day to see if Tua is victorious against Rahman on Saturday? I have no problem making Tua's 30-day negotiation period inclusive of the time leading up to the Rahman fight to meet the WBO's deadline. I find it so curious that the WBO goes from a 30-day period of negotiation to a purse bid one day before David's fight against Rahman. David Tua is the 'Best Classified Contender Available. All we ask is that the WBO adhere to its own rules and respect its own ratings."

I'm not really sure what they were looking for there. McCain doesn't have a good recent history of bringing Ali Act violations to light. Let's put it this way - he hasn't done it yet. So whether he'll do anything substantive in this case may be completely dependent upon whether there are any cheap headlines that can be garnered.

You know, the WBA has mandated Roy Jones to fight Vitali Klitschko in defense of his heavyweight title, while Klitschko had filed a legal action in an attempt to compel Lennox Lewis to defend his WBC championship against him in a mandatory situation. My understanding is that the action was dropped, but what if it was still alive, Jones committed to a fight with Klitschko, and then Klitschko won a legal decision over Lewis? Going into court would seem to be a clear statement of intention on Klitschko's part, and it could be argued that he would have left Jones high and dry.

On that basis, wouldn't the WBA have been justified in granting Jones the leeway - at least for the time being - to fight an optional defense, while the Klitschko situation was being resolved? I'm not sure there's a definitive answer. But it's a damn good question.

There is a certain similarity in the Tua situation. Clearly, in fighting an IBF-sanctioned fight, there is every intention on his part to become the IBF's mandatory challenger in the

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heavyweight division. But there is no guarantee that even with a win, Tua would WANT to fight Byrd, whose style confounded him the first time around, if there were another way to go. And there is certainly no guarantee that Tua wouldn't perhaps make more coin fighting Corrie Sanders in South Africa than he could fighting Byrd on U.S. soil, because of the live gate possibilities.

Understandably, he wants to have more than one option open. And just as understandably, Don King wants to narrow those options. If King can put Lamon Brewster in the ring with Sanders, as has now seemingly been mandated, and if Brewster wins, King will have two heavyweight champs under his promotional wing - Brewster and Byrd. And he's still desirous of doing extended business with both Lewis and Jones, who comprise the rest of the heavyweight landscape.

The question I have is - since when did the WBO become such a believer in its own rules? As I look at the super middleweight ratings, I see Freeman Barr as the #1 contender - the mandatory challenger for champion Joe Calzaghe. Barr has been sitting in the #1 position since May 1, 2001. That's almost two years. He has done everything the WBO has asked of him, including fighting for, winning, and defending his NABO belt. He has brought up the issue of this mandatory defense for quite some time, and has made repeated requests for purse bids; something I know because Barr's manager, Steve Canton, is a friend of mine and we have been discussing this for about as far back as I can recall. Yet Barr has never received his opportunity to fight Calzaghe.

Why?

Well, in this case, it's very simple. Because Frank Warren, one of the promoters who has his hands clutched very firmly around the WBO's collective neck, doesn't want to put the fight on. He claims he can't make any money with it. He says he can't sell it to television, etc.

That could all be correct. But you want to know something? That's Frank Warren's problem, if he wants to handle the super middleweight champion, that is. The WBO should not be making it Freeman Barr's problem. Whether Barr is a worthy #1 contender doesn't matter. The fact is - rules are rules - at least that's what the WBO would have you believe - and if Barr is the top contender, he deserves his title shot as per the WBO rules, every bit as much as the WBO contends Brewster does. In fact, even more so, because Barr is #1, and has been waiting for so long.

I fully understand the economics of boxing. But TV networks shouldn't be running sanctioning bodies. And neither should promoters.

And if Frank Warren doesn't want to put his fighter into the ring with Freeman Barr, then Joe Calzaghe **SHOULD BE STRIPPED OF HIS TITLE.**

Under the circumstances, I hardly think the WBO has a case for hiding behind its own rules, and creating what amounts to a bogus purse bid situation, when it appears to be selectively playing to the advantage of one promoter in particular. And it probably shouldn't be allowed to do

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business in the United States until such time as it is ready to enforce its rules equally.

And gee, while we're at it, can someone tell me the last time Dariusz Michalczewski faced a mandatory challenger, in accordance with WBO "rules"? I must admit - I haven't done a ton of research here, but it certainly hasn't been any time in the last few years. And to my recollection, he NEVER has. Michalczewski has been permitted to fight a roster of stiffes and has-beens while leaving #1 contenders, most recently Antonio Tarver, waiting and waiting and waiting for him to come to the table.

Please understand that none of this is particularly hard to pull off when your promoter/manager (the Boxing Writers Association remembers him as their "Co-Manager of the Year") is Klaus-Peter Kohl (rhymes with "control"), who is one of the guys in charge at the WBO. That's okay - his head is big enough to wear many hats.

While you're whining about such misbehavior, though, please make note of Rule #20 in the WBO's "Regulations"

"20) EXCEPTION TO THE REGULATIONS

The World Championships Regulations shall be amended at any time, with respect to any aspect, through an exception or special case, provided the amendment is approved by the majority vote of the World Championships Committee and the Executive Committee."

That's the rule that applies here - get it?

See, I knew there was an explanation somewhere (for the uninitiated, that's called a "tongue-in-cheek" remark).

Naturally, I'm predisposed to feel a certain way about the WBO, since, after all, one of its officials once made the offer to steer one of my fighters straight into a mandatory challenger's position - in exchange for a layoff of ten grand, of course (something that was detailed in our first "Operation Cleanup" book).

So David, you've got someone potentially even better than Senator McCain on your side.

You've got Mr. Jay.

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