

Add The Name Chris Byrd To An Already Long List

Written by Frank Lotierzo
Tuesday, 27 July 2004 18:00

Within the last week IBF Heavyweight Champion Chris Byrd became part of a unique boxing fraternity, one that he no doubt wishes he could've avoided. That's right, Byrd joins the long list of fighters who have sued promoter Don King for some form of breach of contract. Judd Burnstein, Byrd's attorney, filed claims for relief against King in New York District Court. The suit alleges that King knowingly perpetrated acts of fraud against Byrd. Byrd is claiming \$13,000,000 in damages, and \$50,000,000 in punitive damages. On top of that, Byrd is asking the court for a judgment to free him from his current contract with Don King Productions.

Basically, this goes back to when Byrd signed an exclusive promotional contract with King granting him the right to promote Chris Byrd's fights. The agreement stipulated that if Byrd won the IBF Heavyweight title, which he did when he decisioned Evander Holyfield in December of 2002 -- King would see that Byrd fought twice every 12 months, with King contracted to pay Byrd \$2.5 million per fight. It also stated that Byrd was to receive \$2.5 million per fight regardless of the opponent or the financial success of the promotion.

Without getting bogged down in the legal jargon, what transpired is King has not paid Byrd the \$2.5 million for either of the fights he's had since signing the agreement. King has said that he just can't afford to pay Byrd what the agreement calls for because his fights haven't brought in enough money. Byrd, to his credit, even settled for less money from King for the two fights he had under the contract and hadn't really made an issue of it until the last few months. It's been reported that Byrd was paid less than \$1.0 million for each of the two fights he had under the agreement versus Fres Oquendo and Andrew Golota. Under the contract Byrd had with King, he should've been paid \$5.0 million for those two bouts.

The fact that Byrd didn't get the money he was guaranteed, it didn't lead to an immediate lawsuit. What led to the lawsuit was Byrd not believing that King was being forthright with him claiming financial straights. Apparently the trust factor with Chris Byrd is a bigger issue than the money. For anyone who knows or has spent time with Byrd, it's easy to see that he's not all about money. However, don't let him sense that you may be lying to him or trying to pull one over on him. Byrd, being a man of strong faith and principle, probably can't be part of an agreement once he loses trust in the other party. If he no longer can take King at his word, which is most likely the case, then it's easy to see why this will be decided by the court.

The fallout from this contract dispute between Chris Byrd and Don King Productions can have a damning effect on not just Byrd, but the Heavyweight division. If somehow Byrd is unable to box while he fights it out with King in court, the division will be minus one of its best fighters. Chris Byrd is one of the few fighters around today in any division who never squawks about money, and who is more than willing to fight anybody.

The Heavyweight division as of this writing is very pedestrian at best. Many of the upper tier Heavyweights don't always show up in top shape and aren't always willing to fight the best opposition. That's where Byrd breaks the mold. He is always in top shape and knows what he's

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doing in the ring. Weighing usually between 205-210 pounds, Byrd has not only survived in the so called land of the giants, he's thrived in it. He is an unorthodox southpaw who is very tough, with an outstanding chin. When he fights he's so relaxed and loose, he's like trying to hit a sheet hard that's hung over a clothes line. Byrd has a way of totally neutralizing his opponents' strengths, sort of like taking the bullets out of their gun. He is also very elusive from the waist up, and is deceptively fast. The only thing Byrd lacks is Heavyweight measurements and the knockout power that some expect to see from an upper tier Heavyweight. However, he's made his lack of size and power work to his advantage in most of his bouts.

The last thing the Heavyweight division needs is for Chris Byrd to be taken out of it over a contract dispute with Don King. Byrd is the current IBF Champ and holds a win over WBC Champ Vitali Klitschko, the fighter many boxing observers believe is the top Heavyweight in the world. There are so many potential and compelling fights that can be made involving Byrd, it would be a crime to have him sitting on the sidelines waiting his day in court. Especially since it's over money that he's already earned and should've been paid.