

Don King Responds To Diaz Camp Allegations

Written by Robert Mladinich
Wednesday, 05 March 2008 19:00

A list of grievous complaints was leveled against promoter Don King by Willie Savannah, the longtime manager of Juan Diaz, who holds three versions of the lightweight title, on March 5th. Those complaints were reported by TSS.

The 24-year-old Diaz, 33-0 (17 KOS), who is also a law student at the University of Houston-Downtown, will be defending those titles against Nate "The Galaxxy Warrior" Campbell, 31-5-1 (25 KOS), on Saturday, March 8th.

(In Diaz's last two fights, he stopped world champions Acelino Freitas and Julio Diaz in stunning fashion).

The Diaz-Campbell fight is part of an HBO-televised broadcast from Cancun, Mexico, that is headlined by the WBC heavyweight title bout between Oleg Maskaev and Samuel Peter.

It is only fair that King, as well as the highly respected attorney Fred Levin, who also ceased working with Diaz because of difficulties with Savannah, be given equal time.

Here is a point-for-point rebuttal to Savannah's claims of impropriety:

Savannah: "When we signed with Don, we wanted to close out our career with him. The fights we've had with Don before the fights (in the ring) were worse than the actual fights."

Don King: "In September 2006, Juan, then the WBA lightweight champion, and his manager, Willie, agreed to be promoted by me. Willie said Juan wanted to be more active, make more money, and have the opportunity to win more belts."

"In one year, between November 2006 and October 2007, Juan fought and won three times. I paid him more than \$2 million and gave him the opportunity to gain the IBF and the WBO lightweight titles – not to mention becoming a main event, pay-TV fighter. I also paid training responses for all three fights."

"I also paid Michael Katsidis \$80,000 to step aside before the Freitas fight. And Juan will receive \$800,000 to fight on Saturday night (against Campbell)."

Savannah: Speaking about the promotional agreement with King and the fight with Campbell, he said that Diaz had already agreed to a \$250,000 pay cut from his original purse "just to get this over with."

Alan Hopper, Director of Publicity for Don King Productions (DKP): "Willie asked for \$1 million for this fight. Don offered \$750,000, plus \$50,000 for training expenses, and Willie accepted it. Is that an honest way of representing that he took a \$250K cut?"

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Savannah: He (Savannah) said that shortly after his arrival in Mexico, he received a notice stating that King had promised the government that all of the boxers fighting on the show would agree to donate 4 percent of their purses to a local charity.

“No one ever agreed to this. I already told my lawyer that there is no way I’m going to pay on what Don King promised somebody.”

“I’ve spoken to my lawyer and he said HBO can’t pay taxes for us and Don King can’t pay taxes for us. In the end we are responsible for our own taxes. I hope that there are no problems when the fights are all over and everyone is at the airport trying to go home.”

Alan Hopper: “Don promised no such thing.” He then explained that Savannah answered the tax/charity question himself by making the above comment.

“It wasn’t a payment for charity. It’s a local tax that they may have referred to as a donation for charity.”

Savannah: He (Savannah) said that he had learned in Mexico that he and Diaz would be responsible for paying all of the expenses related to the WBO and WBA sanctioning bodies. This includes sanctioning fees, as well as costs associated with housing and feeding the inspectors. No such demand was made for the IBF expenses.

Alan Hopper: “He (Savannah) and Don agreed, for this show, that Willie is responsible to pay the sanctioning fees for the WBA and the WBO. This is unusual, but that’s what Willie agreed to. He wanted this responsibility. Now he has it.”

“It was also agreed that the IBF would be the responsibility of DKP. That’s why you haven’t heard anything about it. It’s done.”

Savannah: “I have continuous fights with King. If he would just follow what it says in the contracts, we’d have no problem. With (another promoter) you would just read the contract, skip over to the highlights, and sign with no problems.”

Those feelings were seconded by another boxing insider who said he too “had to endure Willie” when he did business with him.

Fred Levin: He (Levin) stated that when he was retained by Diaz he went to the free market to get him the best deal, which happened to be with King. Below are excerpts from a letter he wrote to Savannah after enduring a sleepless night brought on by all this ill will.

“What occurred after contracting with Don is similar to what you have done with all of the other promoters in the past. It is a very contentious, in-your-face type of negotiations between you and the promoter. Of course, my style was totally different.”

Levin went on to explain that his negotiating style resulted in Savannah accusing him of being a “sellout.” Having been a lawyer since the early 1960s, and having represented numerous

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boxers over the years, Levin said he could not, in good conscience, continue to work with Diaz because of the poisonous environment created by Savannah.

“It has reached a point that I can no longer in good conscience represent Juan Diaz. I look back and realize that the biggest problem is that I have only spoken to Juan on one occasion. Although I represented Juan, all of the communication was through you. Willie, I’ve been practicing law for almost 47 years. I have never had a client complain about anything that I have done in the practice of law until now.”

Whether or not Diaz can fight and win through all this drama is yet to be seen. He has shown himself to be steadfast in his joint commitments to boxing and law. While his physical strengths and boxing abilities have never been in question, he will have a lot on his mind come Saturday night.

My guess is that he will probably stop Campbell by the tenth round. Afterwards the real fireworks will begin. When the dust settles, I hope that Diaz, who is as nice of a young man as you will find anywhere, is still standing with a smile on his face and a belt around his waist.