

## One Word Describes USA Boxing: DEBACLE

Written by Ron Borges  
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USA Boxing avoided a shutout Sunday but it couldn't avoid a disaster because that's what the Beijing Olympics has become.

Had inexperienced Deontay Wilder not been awarded two points because of a questionable penalty deduction in the final 40 seconds of his quarter final bout against Morocco's Mohammad Arjaoui, the United States boxing team would have failed to qualify a single fighter for the medal round for the first time in 100 years. As it is, Wilder's 23-22 victory (after a 10-10 tie in regular scoring forced the judges to go to what is called agreement scoring, meaning the highest and lowest judge's cards are thrown out and the others are added together) guarantees him at least a bronze medal but all that guaranteed the U.S.A.'s boxing team was its worst performance since 1948.

After defending world champion Demetrius Andrade was stunned by an 11-9 loss and left the ring in tears, all that was left was Wilder, who three years ago was a college basketball player with no boxing experience. Fortunately for the United States that all changed and frankly everything has to change with USA Boxing as well after what has become an utter debacle in Beijing.

Not only have seven fighters, including two world champions, been beaten before the medal rounds but another, Gary Russell, Jr., collapsed unconscious in his room from dehydration after struggling to make weight and was disqualified. That doesn't even mention the palace revolt that took place in June when team captain Luis Yanez was briefly thrown off the team by head coach Dan Campbell for refusing to return to USA Boxing's year-long training camp in Colorado Springs.

This led the 65-year-old Campbell, who is supposed to be the adult in the group, to label Yanez "One of the biggest liars I've ever met."

Yanez very well may be for all we know, but having the coach categorize publicly the 19-year-old captain of his team that way made obvious to the world what had privately become an intolerable situation between the coaching staff and their fighters.

Yanez was reinstated but the air was never cleared. Instead, criticism of Campbell became louder and more persistent from the fighters, their parents and their individual coaches until it was obvious during the Games that no one was listening to him. Not the first American to box in two Olympics in 32 years, Rau'shee Warren, who looked away from his coaches and into the stands in the final 35 seconds of his fight, thus being told he was ahead by his supporters and not in need of throwing another punch when in fact he was behind. His corner was hollering for him to punch but their advice fell upon deaf ears and he lost by a single point, ending an eight-year quest through two Olympic Games without having won a single match.

That stunning defeat was followed quickly by several more, including Yanez's upsetting loss in

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his second fight of the tournament. That defeat came seemingly with Yanez doing the opposite of every single thing he was told to do by Campbell. Yanez admitted as much after he'd lost, 9-7, and Campbell gave him up completely by saying, "He basically did the opposite of what we asked him to do."

That is exactly what Yanez promised he would do last month when he said he wouldn't be listening to his coaches, who he neither respected nor trusted. He was true to his word, of nothing else. Now remember this was THE CAPTAIN of the team saying these things about the head coach. Where do you go from there?

Home in a hurry, with nothing particularly valuable to declare at Customs.

So what we have here then is a "team" in which the coaches publicly give up their athletes to the media and the athletes ignore whatever the coaches say and let the world know it. In other words, what we have here is a failure to communicate as well as a complete breakdown of what this is all supposed to be about.

Campbell is right when he says his fighters are too distracted by outside influences like family, personal coaches and professional managers and promoters who are pursuing them. Then again, it's USA Boxing that credentials many of those same managers, like Shelly Finkel (who has had the run of the place for years), as well as others representing the professional side of the sport, then complains about their presence.

As for family and personal coaches, the fact of the matter is the members of this year's team, or any of our teams, reached the Olympics because of the work of family and their amateur trainers and coaches. Campbell and his staff had little or nothing to do with that success so exactly who does he think those kids would most respect and trust? Them or a guy who would publicly called their captain "one of the biggest liars I ever met"?

What was just as bad were Campbell's constant claims that whatever went wrong was the fault of his fighters or the people around them. He called Russell lazy at one point even though the guy never failed to make weight as far as anyone could recall until he got to the Olympic team. Then it happened before the biggest tournament of his life. How are the coaches and the staff of USA Boxing blameless?

Warren loses because he didn't listen to Campbell. Yanez loses because he didn't listen to Campbell. Andrade loses and then storms out of the ring before the winner is announced and Campbell says on national television he was all right with that because he didn't feel Andrade was treated fairly by the judges. This is the guy leading these kids?

Excuse making has been a large part of this latest USA Boxing team. At one point, Campbell was heard telling Wilder in the corner, at a time when it was a one-point match, that he couldn't understand how his opponent was being given points.

What possible good did that do? First off, neither Campbell nor Wilder had any control over that so how about talking to his fighter about things they could control – like how to fight the next

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round? Second, how can it serve his fighters to hear that from their coaches? It's disheartening enough to see your teammates lose. You don't need to hear your coach claiming you're getting hosed IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FIGHT.

If Campbell was complaining to his fighters about the scoring in the heat of the moment like that you can bet he was also talking about it during training and strategy sessions when what he should have been talking to them about was how to be sure they were throwing the most effective scoring blows they could. Of course, no one was listening to him anyway, according to both him and them, so the whole exercise was a futile and doomed from the start.

This slide into mediocrity in USA Boxing has been going on since at least 1992, the first time in years the USA had only one gold medalist (Oscar De La Hoya). Since those Games in Barcelona, there have been four Olympiads. America has earned only two gold medals in boxing, one by David Reid in 1996 in a fight he was losing badly when he nailed his Cuban opponent with a desperation right hand that stopped him, and Andre Ward in 2004 in Athens.

It is unlikely Wilder will win gold but he will at least win something. But what does that mean for USA Boxing and its new chief executive, Jim Millman?

What it should mean is an entire overhaul of not only how they do things but who does them. USA Boxing has had the same faces around either as coaches, technical advisors or hanging on the periphery of the program for 12 years. To say they need to air the place out would be an understatement.

They need new faces, new ideas and an abandoning of the territorial battles of the adults in charge which allowed for the exclusion of someone like Dr. Wilbert "Skeeter" McClure, a 1960 gold medalist in boxing and a professional psychologist and college professor whom USA Boxing rejected for a position as the team's sports psychologist in 2004. He never heard from them again.

That was their loss, which is something USA Boxing is getting used to.