

All you need to know about Don King's Saturday night boxing promotion in Chengdu, China is that the Colonel won't be there.

"Colonel" Bob Sheridan is perhaps the best known boxing broadcaster in the world. Not in the United States mind you, where he has for years been a well-kept secret, but around the globe. Sheridan has broadcast Don King's fight cards internationally for over 25 years and is seen as the voice of American boxing everywhere but in America so it comes as no surprise that he'll be behind the microphone Saturday when 40-year-old Andrew Golota tries to resurrect his heavyweight boxing career for the fourth time, in a WBC elimination fight with journeyman Ray Austin, while perennial fringe contender Jameel McCline tries to do the same at the expense of Chicago's Brian Mollo.

They are the top half of a King fight card in Chengdu that will also feature the comeback of Marco Antonio Barrera and the return of King's hottest young prospect, Devon Alexander. The promotion is being staged in a city with an urban area of over 8 million that was ravaged by a massive earthquake earlier this year. A year ago the WBA convention was held in that city, an industrial area with high-tech factories producing products for Microsoft, IBM, Symantec, Motorola, Intel and others that the Chinese government is trying to turn into a tourist destination site.

The government invited the WBC to bring its annual meetings there this year and after agreeing, WBC president Jose Sulaiman suggested the government and a locally based Chinese promoter partner with King to produce an international fight card to be held in conjunction with the convention.

This is now in place but Sheridan is not. While the fights will be contested and broadcast nationally on China's CCTV5, its equivalent of ESPN, the international broadcast which will go out to 43 countries will take the Chinese feed and send it via satellite back to Los Angeles, where Sheridan will broadcast it live from a control room at the Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles.

"We've done live broadcasts from Hong Kong and Korea but it's easier to distribute it around the world from LA with fiber optic cable and all of that," said Frank Belmonte, whose New Jersey-based production company does a multitude of international fight broadcasts annually.

Belmonte will be on site in China coordinating the production along with the Chinese television crew but Sheridan will be back in LA, doing the fight off a monitor while Belmonte's production team will add the graphics and any fill segments necessary in the event of early knockouts.

"I'll coordinate it here and be in touch with the Chinese production people," Belmonte explained. "We can make it happen. It won't affect Bob at all except that instead of being at ringside he'll be in a control room in LA when the live feed comes in."

People's Republic Welcomes Barrera, Golota

Written by Ron Borges

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“This is the easiest way to get it done. If you start to bring your own production crew and personnel over, that’s when it can become very difficult. The people here are very cooperative but when you’re in someone else’s country they’re in charge.”

A case in point is that King’s long-time public relations director, Alan Hopper, will also serve as the ring announcer, but he will not stand alone. Hopper, who has been in China for the past 10 days with King and the fighters helping to promote and stage the event, will be accompanied by a Chinese-speaking counterpart in the ring when he is “ready to rumble.”

“There will be a Chinese ring announcer too,” Hopper said from Chengdu this week. “We’ll sort of stand together and I’ll speak in English and then he’ll do it in Chinese. That’s kind of interesting because it reflects the whole idea of the show.”

King has entitled the promotion “We Are Together,” a use of a statement long ago made by Chairman Mao. Following the devastating May earthquake, which registered 7.8 on the Richter scale and killed thousands while leaving more than a million people homeless, that phrase became the rallying cry for the city.

This is not the first Chinese rodeo for Hopper or Golota, who both were part of a 1999 King card in Guangzhou. Hopper also worked on the ill-fated 2001 card in Beijing that was supposed to pit Evander Holyfield against John Ruiz. A Ruiz neck injury caused that card to be cancelled. Hopper well remembers the difference between the logistical problems then and now.

“Nothing is the same,” Hopper said. “In 2001 we had to show them how to build the ring. This time we say we need something and we have it in 15 minutes.

“In 2001 there were cranes every where. Seven years later I can see where all the U.S. money spent on Chinese products at Wal-Mart has gone. It’s stunning. In 2001, China seemed like an upscale third world country. Today it’s hard to differentiate its cities from any in the West.”

The fight will be held at the Sichuan Gymnasium, a 10,000-seat arena scaled to 8,000 for King’s show. Prices range from 4800 yuan for gold circle ringside (the equivalent of about \$700) to 512 yuan (\$90) down to a low of 40 yuan, which is about \$6. How the tickets are going is difficult to know, Hopper said, but he added, “The government people have told us to anticipate a sellout.”

When Hopper arrived, elaborate posters in Chinese already had been printed, graphics and banner logos were in place and when ringside physician Dr. Alan Fields asked for a stethoscope and other medical equipment because his bags had been lost in transit “he had them in four minutes. Literally,” Hopper said.

The fighters are all being housed in a Holiday Inn Express that sits a short walk from the arena. In fact, Hopper said most of the fighters chose to walk to a mid-week final press conference called to hype the event.

No limos, no entourages, no problems.

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"It's really not too different from being back home this time except for the (13 hour) time difference," Hopper said. "There's a Starbucks on every corner."

If Golota, McCline or the rest of the fighters on the card were looking for a piece of Americana they could get it there in spades. Not only were there familiar lattes and cappuccinos on the menu but there was familiar American pricing, too.

"We have about 20 interns working with us from the Chengdu Sports University here," Hopper said. "We took some of them out to dinner at a local place they knew and it cost us 125 yuan. We went to Starbucks for a coffee after and it cost us 200 yuan."