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How long does it take to decide if a piece of wet gauze has plaster of Paris on it or not?

In my two-year-old's classroom at pre-school it would probably take about five minutes. In California, it is now two plus days and counting.

The California State Athletic Commission took the hand wraps and a faulty "pad'' found in one of them from Antonio Margarito prior to Saturday night's knockout loss to Shane Mosley after Mosley's chief second, Nazim Richardson, complained about the amount of tape on one hand and of a lump in the wrap. A commission inspector agreed and ordered the wrap be removed and Margarito's hand re-wrapped.

It was then that Mosley's camp claims a foreign substance was found underneath the tape on a wet hand wrap that, they say, was beginning to harden. Mosley's physician, Dr. Robert Olvera, claims it was a suspicious substance similar to what is used to make a cast. Stephen Espinoza, an attorney for Golden Boy Promotions, also claimed the fouled hand wrap had a plaster-like substance on it and was beginning to harden.

Margarito's camp, led by co-managers Francisco Espinoza and Sergio Diaz, both claim the issue has been blown out of proportion and that the problem was simply that the tape was too high. When Diaz was told Mosley's camp has claimed the gauze had been dipped in plaster and meant to harden under the tape, he said, "No way.''

The California Commission remains mum through all this, thus allowing speculation and doubt to grow not only over the validity of the charges but also over what they were doing when they were supposed to be observing the wrapping of Margarito's hands.

First off, the wrapping should not have started until Richardson arrived unless someone from Mosley's camp advised the commission they would waive watching the hand wrapping. Obviously that was not the case. Second, and perhaps more importantly, why wasn't the commission's observer A) telling them to wait until Mosley's representative arrived or B) catching himself the problem Richardson pointed out?

What's the point of having regulations if they aren't fully enforced? What's the point of having inspectors signing the hand wraps if they don't pay attention to what's going on when the hands are being wrapped?

If the wrap in question was wet, how did the commission not notice? If there was a foreign substance, as Mosley's people claim, on the wrap how is it no one from the commission saw it? Most importantly, how does a wet hand wrap get put on Margarito's hand in the first place if the CSAC inspector is doing his job?

What that all brings to mind is a concern that this now turns into a whitewash rather than a

search for the truth because if there was an illegal substance on the wrap, whether to add punching power or simply to try and protect Margarito's hand, how did it go unnoticed in the first place?

Was his hand partially wrapped with gauze and tape before even the commission inspector arrived? Was someone there but failing to do their job? And why did it take Nazim Richardson, Mosley's trainer, to spot the problem and bring it to the commission's attention?

All those questions also raise a far larger one – how often might something similar or worse go on in California in smaller fights where far less attention is being paid and where often no representative from the other fighter is in the locker room to observe the hand wrapping process?

Francisco Espinoza, Margartio's co-manager, told a Mexican newspaper, Primera Hora, that the gauze had been prepared several weeks ago with a wet cloth that caused it to become humid and harden. Huh?

Normally if gauze gets wet it doesn't harden. It softens. Unless, of course, someone loads it with something like plaster of Paris or whatever is used these days to make casts. Then, I would assume, it would harden aplenty.

Of course, if that was the case, then it would also be illegal now wouldn't it and if so, what's the commission waiting for?

One wild card in all this was Diaz's claim Monday night that while they had not broken any rules in the wrapping of Margarito's hands, their fighter had undergone EYE SURGERY just over a week before the right to repair a condition Diaz claimed could have resulted in a detached retina if Margarito fought with it.

Makes you wonder if there even IS a California State Athletic Commission. We all understand the budget is tight in California these days but how do you miss wet hand wraps and possibly plaster of Paris hardening on those wraps, allow the guy to begin wrapping his hands in the first place before Mosley's representative shows up and also miss the fact the same fighter had eye surgery a week or so before the fight?

Anything else they missed?

At the moment, the fouled wraps and whatever is on them, is somewhere in Sacramento, the state capitol, where an investigation is supposedly going on. Meanwhile, in San Juan on Wednesday, Margarito's recent victim, former champion Miguel Cotto, will hold a press conference very likely to demand the circumstances around his own bloody loss to Margarito be looked into.

A statement from Cotto called for a full investigation and that Margarito be held responsible if something illegal is found. Cotto may have a point and it's understandable why he might be skeptical but he also got hit about 2000 times in that fight, it seemed, so that probably had

something to do with the damage he suffered and is really a red herring when it comes to Plastergate.

This all led Teddy Atlas, ESPN2 boxing analyst and a long-time advocate for a national boxing commission, to remark Monday night that, “This makes you worry about the lack of policing in boxing. California has all kinds of problems with its commission.’’

Considering that in June, 2005 the same commission allowed a boxer to fight in Ontario, Ca., without a clear HIV test and that fighter was later found to have tested positive for the HIV virus that would seem to be an understatement.

“This is why boxing needs a national commission, national conformity to one set of regulations and enforcement power,’’ Atlas said. “You don’t just need standards. We’ve got standards. It’s the ability to enforce them.

“Why are we still wondering two days after the fight if one guy was endangering the other with an illegal hand wrap? They say the wrap was wet. Wet? That’s not normal. That doesn’t conform to the rules and it doesn’t sound too good.

“They only caught it, if it’s anything, because a non-commission guy, Mosley’s trainer, caught it. That doesn’t inspire confidence.

“It’s a little ridiculous. You have the right to watch a guy’s hands being wrapped and then they let them start wrapping before you get in there? Who’s watching the store? It’s absurd. It hurts the sport.

“Then when they find a problem the fighter doesn’t even have to make up an alibi. They just re-wrap and he goes off and fights. What other sport would allow that?’’

Frankly, none.