

Square Rings Gets A Good Man: A Sign Don King Is Slipping?

Written by Ron Borges

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Bobby Goodman is back in boxing, not that he ever really left. But is Don King?

That is the question a lot of people have been asking lately and the latest announcement that Goodman, a long-time King operative, has signed on as chief operating officer of Roy Jones' Square Ring promotional company raised the question once again Thursday. That Don King Productions has slid from the Olympus it once was in boxing is clear. The question is how far, and how permanent, is the slide?

Goodman had actually been laid off by King several months ago, more than a year after Goodman decided to leave Florida, where King's business is based, and return to New Jersey to be closer to his extended family. The former Madison Square Garden matchmaker and promoter, who will be inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in June, then was forced to have knee replacement surgery. It was a trying spell for the son of the esteemed Murray Goodman, an ace sportswriter and boxing publicist.

Ultimately, King continued what has been a significant downsizing of his operation by letting the soon-to-be 70-year-old Goodman go and Square Ring CEO John Wirt, a former King house attorney who left him last year, wasted little time adding him to Jones' promotional team.

"We're very proud to have Bob Goodman on our team," said Square Ring President Roy Jones, Jr. in a press release announcing the hiring. "He's a great addition and shows how serious we are about the future of our company."

Goodman had been serving as vice president of boxing operations and public relations for DKP for some years after a lengthy run spent reviving boxing at Madison Square Garden. Goodman was instrumental in developing world champions Buddy McGirt, Kevin Kelley, Junior Jones, Aaron Davis, Tom "Boom Boom" Johnson, Tracy Harris Patterson, Lonnie Bradley, Julio Cesar Green and Hector Acero Sanchez as well as heavyweight contender Michael Dokes before MSG underwent a similar downturn.

Wirt worked for 10 years with Goodman inside King's operation when it was flourishing before opting out and joining forces with Jones as he prepared to fight Joe Calzaghe. Rumor has it that in recent years King has been forced to not only cut staff and reduce pay but also dip into his sizeable personal fortune to keep the company going in the absence of a marquee attraction. Arguably, King has not controlled the career of a big-name world champion since Felix Trinidad was in his heyday and the drain on his business has become obvious.

Yet it is always dangerous for anyone to count King out. Despite the evidence of his company's decline, he has been through this in the past and rebounded mightily. In fact, rather than being in St. Louis this week to promote a show featuring Cory Spinks and hot prospect Devon Alexander, King has spent his time entertaining and enticing Floyd Mayweather, Jr. in Florida in an attempt to affiliate himself with Mayweather upon his return to boxing this summer.

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King then flew to Puerto Rico later in the week, where he was trying to convince Trinidad to comeback one more time for a rematch with Bernard Hopkins, a fight that would seem to make little sense for King and none for Trinidad, who took a terrible beating from Hopkins 7 ½ years ago and has not won a fight in nearly five years.

Both those acts, along with the loss of Goodman, have many tongues wagging about the imminent demise of King and his promotional company. Without question it is no longer what it once was when he and promotional rival Bob Arum ruled the sport. In fact, Arum's company seems on far firmer footing than King's at the moment, although it's not likely King will return to numbers running any time soon to feed himself.

His south Florida estate is on the market for \$27 million and his company is obviously in recession but King has always prided himself as a guy who pays cash as he goes so debt is not likely an issue for him. A dearth of boxing talent is but if he can land Mayweather, who has scoffed at the idea of allowing King to promote him while at the same time spending the past week under his spell, King becomes instantly relevant again because Mayweather is the most talented fighter in the world when he's active.

At 77, King may be old and tired but he remains wily and dangerous to anyone in boxing who underestimates him. The loss of Goodman may be a signal that Don King Productions continues its downsizing or it may simply be the expression of King's well known distaste for having employees living and working outside of his offices, and away from his tentacles, in Deerfield Beach, Fla.

Whatever the situation, King continues to search for the next fighter he can attach himself to. If it is Floyd Mayweather, Jr. he won't be downsizing any more. He'll be hollering.