

MUST READ! Borges Wants HBO, Golden Boy To Do The Right Thing

Written by Ron Borges

Wednesday, 26 August 2009 19:00

It is neither fair nor the way it should be but facts are facts. HBO Sports president Ross Greenburg is the only sheriff in town.

That is neither his job nor his television network's role but it has been thrust upon them both by a sport that proved once again Saturday night it is not only incapable of governing itself but has no intention of governing itself.

If boxing is to survive as anything more than a fading niche joke more akin to wrestling than to HBO's signature monthly show "Real Sports," HBO and Greenburg are the only thing left that can save it and they must do it in the only way the sport understands – by closing their checkbook to the people who continue to perpetrate the kind of fraud that was committed on HBO's customers Saturday night.

HBO has for many years not only called itself, but considered itself, "the Heart and Soul of Boxing." It is their motto. Now it has the chance to prove if it's also how it does its business.

The firestorm resulting from the fistic robbery perpetrated upon Paulie Malignaggi last weekend in Houston by a consortium that included the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation; Dickie Cole, who runs the combat sports end of that department; his son, referee Laurence Cole; Golden Boy Promotions, who handles the affairs of former lightweight champion Juan Diaz and used its power to get every advantage it legally could; and judges Gale Van Hoy (aka Public Enemy No. 1), David Sutherland and Raul Caiz, Sr. (Public Enemy No. 1a) has by now been well aired all over the internet (which by the way is one of the few places where boxing is still talked about because in traditional journalistic venues it was long ago abandoned as a fraud, a joke and a sad parody of what the great sport used to be and still can be when not self-immolating).

In short, Malignaggi agreed to go to Diaz' hometown but in the weeks leading up to the fight laid out all the ways he would be prevented from winning, including for once, naming names.

"They're trying to make it impossible for me to win," he said. "They're doing everything to raise Juan's hand before we even fight."

When the night came every one of Malignaggi's accusations were realized, the worst of them being the scorecard of a 75-year-old man who was either incompetent or dishonest because there are no other explanations for Van Hoy's 118-110 scorecard. For that matter, same was true of Sutherland's 116-112, which was only topped by his even worse 11 rounds to one scoring of a close, close fight between journeyman Ishe Smith and Golden Boy fighter Danny Jacobs on the undercard.

Caiz, accused of being a "gofer" for Golden Boy by Malignaggi with ample past scoring evidence to justify the charge, scored it 115-113 for Diaz. One could at least make that

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argument although, frankly, from this corner it seemed a clear 115-113 the other way in a fight that while competitive was one whose outcome was obvious to any unbiased observer with an understanding of what the word "boxing" means.

That's what Malignaggi did masterfully despite being put into as small a ring as legally allowable by Golden Boy so as to make his job as difficult as possible and forced to fight at a weight 1 1/2 pounds below the normal super lightweight limit of 140. One can argue that as Diaz's promoter Golden Boy was simply doing its job to aid its fighter but the rest of them did the same when their job was to protect BOTH fighters not just the one with the powerful promoter who lived down the block.

Diaz is a plodding, come forward fighter who is a crowd pleaser. Malignaggi is a guy with no power who survives on athletic skill, guile and a big heart. He is an artist painting landscapes no longer understood nor much appreciated by many who claim to be boxing fans but are really brawling fans.

This is not to suggest any of the perpetrators committed a criminal offense. There is no evidence money changed hands. What they were partner to was a moral outrage that more than anything else is why boxing now resides in the cesspool of sports. People long ago grew tired of the kinds of things that went on in two of the three televised fights – which is one-sided refereeing, long a Cole hallmark when a Texas fighter is involved and for which he was suspended in 2006 after the Association of Boxing Commissions filed a complaint against his work with the Texas Ethics Commission, and unfair judging.

Another example of this was a night spent partially standing in the locker room of Micky Ward a few years ago as he waited to fight James Leija, a popular Texas fighter, in Leija's hometown of San Antonio.

Cole refereed that night as well and when he came in to give pre-fight instructions must have said a dozen times "I don't want to get involved." As he left, Ward smiled sadly at me as I said, "We know one thing. He's going to get involved."

Ward clearly opened what would become a bad cut over Leija's right eye in the first round with an uppercut. Ray Charles could have confirmed it. So would Helen Keller. Laurence Cole, however, declared it an accidental head butt.

At the end of five rounds Leija was now bleeding profusely. The fight was stopped and they went to the scorecards. Lo and behold, two judges had Leija ahead. Both were from Texas. One, Duane Ford of Nevada, had Ward leading 48-47. One of the Texan Two Steppers, Ray Hawkins, had it for Leija, 48-47. The other had Leija by a ridiculously wide margin, 49-46, meaning he thought Ward won only one round. That judge was Gale Van Hoy.

Van Hoy and Caiz called the Rocky Juarez-Chris John fight a draw when most observers firmly believed John won. Cole refereed that night and spent most of his time manhandling John rather than doing his job. Who promotes Juarez? Golden Boy Promotions. Where is Juarez from? Texas. When does a coincidence become a trend?

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A LONG TIME AGO.

Draw your own conclusions about Cole, Caiz and Van Hoy. The larger issue is everyone in boxing knows you don't get a fair shake in Texas in a big fight if you aren't from Texas. This has gone on for years and there is only one thing HBO can do about it.

Announce it will no longer broadcast fights in Texas without neutral, out-of-state judges and a neutral referee.

Announce it will pay a bit more than usual for a Diaz-Malignaggi rematch with neutral officials with the fighters' working in a 50-50 co-promotion.

Announce it will continue to monitor closely these kind of situations and base its buying of fights as much on how things run as the fight they're getting because they are tired of having their customers, who are disgusted HBO viewers like myself, ending a good night of boxing unhappy that they wasted their time staying up late to watch an event whose outcome was determined before anyone ever got to the arena.

Greenburg agreed about the ridiculous nature of Van Hoy's card, which even Diaz's promoter Oscar De La Hoya called abysmal, and admitted the sport's constant mismanagement has put HBO in a difficult situation. Clint Eastwood was in the same position in "High Plains Drifter" when as "The Stranger" he moseyed into the fictional Lago, Az. and became the law after the townspeople had their own sheriff murdered when he caught them double dealing and then had the perpetrators locked up to keep them silent but now feared the consequences because the jail cells in Yuma were set to open and release the aggrieved contract killers.

A difficult and uncomfortable situation, you see, is not an excuse for inaction, especially when you're the only sheriff left.

"I'm watching it again now," Greenburg said from his Manhattan office of the Malignaggi-Diaz fight. "The first seven, eight rounds were dead even. That 118-110 was on another planet. The difficulty is Diaz is a big draw in Texas and the economics for a promoter are that he can make a lot more money there. Having said that, I wouldn't think too many opponents would go to Texas to fight Juan Diaz again after this.

"You can't say no fighter can box in his hometown. The sport needs those big crowds and the electricity that comes from a packed house. But these kinds of things are terrible for the sport.

"They have to stop but a TV network is in a difficult spot. We become the go to organization when things are not going well because there is no one like (NFL commissioner) Roger Goodell or (NBA commissioner) David Stern looking out for the sport and reacting to these things.

"It puts a television network in a very strange position because in some ways we are the only ones who can put pressure on because we finance a lot of this stuff. It's easy to say HBO should do something but we can't start regulating state commissions. We can't do the kind of things Goodell and Stern can do."

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True... but what they can do is make clear if Diaz wants to fight on HBO again it will be in a rematch with Malignaggi.

True... but they can make clear they will not buy another fight in the state of Texas without neutral officials.

True... but they can make clear they will no longer allow their money to knowingly finance a fraud upon their customers, one which in this case Malignaggi announced to the world and then had happen to him.

Inadvertently, HBO broadcaster Max Kellerman indicted the sport he makes a handsome living talking about after the fight when he told his audience the problem was "the marketplace." There was no sense of outrage in his voice. He basically saying, "Get over it. This is what boxing is. A fraud."

"Let me preface this by saying everyone deserves a fair shake and there's no excuse for a fighter not getting a fair shake under any circumstances," Kellerman said.

"However, the marketplace spoke tonight. Paulie Malignaggi, it's not as though he couldn't have cultivated an ethnic following in New York. He has, to some degree - an Italian fighting out of New York City. But given his style, and his lack of punching power, he has not been able to cultivate the kind of following that Juan Diaz has been able to here in Houston with a Mexican and a Mexican-American fight crowd that really appreciates – and just fight fans generally – that really appreciate his style of fighting. The fact that every Juan Diaz fight is always exciting and so for that reason, Juan Diaz winds up with the powerful promoter and the hometown decision...possibly, if you consider this a hometown decision. So even though every fighter always deserves a fair shake, I think here the marketplace spoke and Juan Diaz gets the nod."

What? So if the Yankees play the Kansas City Royals "THE YANKEES GET THE NOD." If the Giants play the Jacksonville Jaguars "THE GIANTS GET THE NOD." If the Lakers play the Indiana Pacers "THE LAKERS GET THE NOD." That is insanity. It's also condoning a fraud upon his own viewers.

That comment was as absurd as Gale Van Hoy's scorecard but far more damning. If that's the way the broadcasters view it, how is the rest of the world supposed to look at it?

Richard Schaefer, Golden Boy CEO and as fair-minded and reasonable a man as there is in boxing, did the best he could to defend Diaz while conceding the larger issue – that Van Hoy's card and Kellerman's comments exposed an ugly side to a sport that regularly contributes to its own demise.

He said he felt Diaz won a close fight and that much of the problem may be an educational one for officials but he quickly added that one of two things needed to happen.

"If HBO is interested in buying the fight I have no problem with a rematch," he said from Los Angeles. "If they can fight someone else for more money they'll probably take it but I am

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personally interested in putting some effort into coming up with a number that would satisfy Paulie and Juan.

“I thought Juan won but I can understand the outrage. I know how outraged Oscar was after the Trinidad fight and one of the Mosley fights. We’ve been in their shoes. I don’t know what the solution is but I really don’t think it helps the sport.

“You see this kind of thing from time to time and you’re right, at the end of the day nothing happens. I don’t look at what happened as some big conspiracy. I think it was one bad (score) card but other sports have a structure to deal with that. In boxing that is not the case so you end up with gossip journalism and it creates negative publicity that hurts the sport.

“Paulie Malignaggi deserves one of two things – a rematch with neutral officials or another big, high-visibility fight. That I think he deserves and I give you my word I’ll help him in that regard.”

A rematch with Golden Boy and DiBella Entertainment as co-equal, co-promoters with neutral officials not Texas officials, a normal size ring not a phone booth and the weight at the 140-pound super lightweight limit (if you’re a super lightweight you’re a super lightweight Juan) can only be made if HBO insists upon it. That would allow the fight to be brought back to Houston, where the largest live gate is likely and the most money made.

It would give both fighters a chance to prove who’s best, could set up a possible big-money trilogy if the second fight is as good as the first and would announced the arrival of a new sheriff in boxing’s version of Lago, Arizona - Ross Greenburg and HBO.