

**ST. LOUIS** For public consumption, they wish each other well, although, since they no longer speak to one another they must rely on intermediaries to deliver even that message, and when Cory Spinks defends his WBA junior middleweight title against Cornelius (K-9) Bundrage at the Scottrade Center Saturday night, the odds are that Kevin Cunningham won't see a minute of it. He'll be wrapping the hands of Devon Alexander and otherwise preparing the WBC/IBF 140 pound champion for his HBO main event against Ukrainian Andriy Kotelnik.

Although Cunningham grew up in St. Louis, a city not without its Germanic influences, the word *Schadenfreude* is not part of his everyday vocabulary. Revenge, though, is a dish best served cold, and the onetime St. Louis narcotics squad detective wouldn't be human if he didn't find a certain poetic justice in the role reversal implicit in the card Don King is billing as "Gateway to Greatness."

From the moment a visitor steps off a plane at Lambert Field he is greeted by billboards, prominently featuring Alexander in fighting mode. Spinks' name is nowhere to be seen on the oversized fight posters. HBO viewers probably won't even be aware that he is on the card at all: There are three world title fights on the "Gateway" show, but only two of them — Alexander-Kotelnik and Tavoris Cloud's IBF light-heavyweight title defense against the ageless Jamaican, Glencoffe Johnson — will be carried on the Boxing After Dark telecast, consigning Spinks-Bundrage to some black hole in the boxing universe.

The worst part of this perceived slight for Spinks — and, one suspects, the best part of it for Cunningham — is that even in St. Louis, nobody seems to care.

Less than three years ago Cory Spinks was still the veritable face of St. Louis boxing, a present, former, and future world champion and the heir to a familial legacy. Put his name up in lights and half the "hood in The Lou would come out to watch him fight, and if you harbored any doubts about how good he was, all you had to do was ask him.

But it all unraveled pretty quickly. It wasn't just the losses — they all lose, and sometimes they come back stronger. It was that on two separate occasions Spinks lost title fights *in St. Louis*, in events King had orchestrated as triumphant homecomings. As humiliating as those losses might have been to his fans, Spinks compounded the insult by implicitly throwing the blame on Cunningham when he dumped the guy everybody in St. Louis knew had gotten him there in the first place.

The harsh reality became apparent earlier this year when Spinks signed for his mandatory defense against Bundrage. After two earlier delays, King announced it as the main event of a June 12 card at the 10,000-seat Chaifetz Arena on the St. Louis University campus. On paper it loomed a decent fight, and how much marketing mileage King could have gotten out of the marquee matchup of cornermen (Buddy McGirt vs. Emanuel Steward) we'll never know. It is true that the boxing show faced some unforeseen competition from Super Jam 3, a hip-hop

## THE KIMBALL CHRONICLES: Schadenfreude In St. Louis

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festival staged by a local radio station the same weekend, but for King it was an even more sobering discovery to learn that in 2010 he couldn't *give* away tickets to a Cory Spinks fight in St. Louis. The show was postponed.

Three weeks ago, mainly to get the IBF mandatory out of the way (but also to keep DK's grasp on the title), Spinks-Bundrage was quietly added, as an off-TV fight, to the Alexander-Kotelnik bill.

The provenance of Cunningham's association with Alexander goes back as far to the trainer's early days with Spinks. Alexander was 7 years old and one of 30 youngsters from the Hyde Park ghetto when Cunningham first took him under his wing. Three years later, 10 year old Devon Alexander was one of three kids from the St. Louis club to win a title in the National Silver Gloves tournament. Cunningham still has a clipping of the photograph of Alexander, Quintin Gray, and Willie Ross that ran in the St. Louis American 13 years ago:

Of those three kids, only Devon is still boxing; he became a world champion. Willie is dead. Quinton is doing a life sentence for murder.

Spinks makes it a point to refer to Alexander his "little brother" and said he was looking forward to getting his own fight out of the way Saturday night so he could watch his onetime protégé in his moment of glory, but as one longtime observer of the St. Louis fight scene noted, "it's got to be grating to Spinks to be fighting on Alexander's undercard. It used to be that Devon fought on *his*."

Alexander was 17 years old when he first performed at the Scottrade (nee Savvis) Center. Alexander's third pro fight took place on the undercard of then-stablemate Spinks' welterweight title defense against Zab Judah. Devon, who unanimously outpointed Donovan Castaneda, fared better than did Cory, who was stopped in the ninth. A year later, the night Spinks won a majority decision over Roman Karmazin at the Savvis to lift the IBF 154-pound title from the Russian, Alexander barely broke a sweat, scoring a first-round knockout of Tyler Ziolkowski on the undercard.

Cunningham had been with Spinks since Cory was a 16 year-old amateur, but a few months after his unsuccessful 2007 challenge to Jermain Taylor in Memphis, Spinks sent the trainer packing. It was a move so craven that it even pissed off his old friends from the "hood" and these are guys who normally *hate* cops.

A veteran local named Buddy Shaw was in charge of the Spinks corner the night Cory lost to 39 year-old Verno Phillips. Alexander and Cunningham fared better. Devon fought Panamanian Miguel Callist, winning all 12 rounds on all three scorecards at the Scottrade.

And when Spinks claimed his current title in April of 2009, eking out a split decision over Deandre Lattimore to win the once-again vacant IBF belt, Alexander and Cunningham once again played a supporting role. Alexander knocked out Jesus Rodriguez in the ninth round.

Which is not to suggest that Alexander's apprenticeship consisted of serving as Cory Spinks' caddie. Almost as if he were grooming him for greatness, Don King had been widening his

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exposure by putting him on highly visible shows almost from the outset of his career. Well before he fought for a title of his own, we'd already seen Alexander in several far-flung venues: Three years ago we were there to see him knock out Maximino Cuevas on the Samuel Peter-James Toney undercard in Florida and Marcus Luck on the Joachim Alcine-Travis Simms bill in Connecticut. He began 2008 by beating Chop Chop Corley on the Roy Jones-Felix Trinidad card at the Garden and ended it by TKO'ing Christopher Fernandez on the Tomas Adamek-Steve Cunningham show in Newark. *Only in America:*

The original idea was that Devon Alexander and Don King were going to visit the Rams on Monday, but that was before Dick Vermeil decided to stop by. Given his choice of motivational speakers between the last St. Louis coach to win a Super Bowl and 23 year-old boxer, Ram's coach Steve Spagnuolo opted for the former, so the trip to Earth City was rescheduled for Tuesday.

That was probably OK with Devon, who had to be a bit worn out from all the glad-handing at the civic reception they arranged in his honor Sunday night. Besides the politicians (Sen. Claire McCaskill; St. Louis Board of Aldermen chairman Lewis Reed), the musicians (Chuck Berry; rapper Yung Ro), the Entertainer (as in Cedric The), there were a couple thousand St. Louis citizens, and King was sort of hoping that a few of them might even be so inspired by the experience that they might even buy tickets to Saturday night's card at the Scottrade Center.

Spagnuolo had scheduled a knock-down, drag-out, full-contact intramural scrimmage for 6:30 Saturday evening. Given the fever pitch these things reach before concluding, the last thing the first-year coach wanted to risk was having a large posse of his offensive players running into a platoon from the defense, bent on vengeance, in some Missouri watering hole later on that night, so as soon as the final whistle blows on the scrimmage, Spagnuolo will hustle his charges straight out of the shower and onto buses waiting to transport them to the Scottrade Center. King will provide the buses and tickets. Spagnuolo will provide a hundred or so large bodies to fill out the HBO camera angles.

And who knows? If the Rams play their cards right, Cory vs. K-9 might even be over by the time they get there.

That bit of business having been concluded, Alexander made his address to the troops short and sweet.

?I just broke camp,? he reminded the hulking football players, while just behind him King cackled and waved a fistful of miniature flags. ?You guys have just started.?

DK and Devon presented Spagnuolo with a signed boxing glove. Alexander promised the assembled players he would retain his unified titles Saturday night ? ?and the Rams will soon be headed back to he Super Bowl!?

When pigs fly.\*\*\*

The entire buildup to the ?Gateway to Greatness ? card has made it clear that this is Devon

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Alexander's night. Two nights before the fight, the Midwestern affiliate of FoxSportsNet aired a half-hour documentary entitled *Gateway to Greatness: The Devon Alexander Story*. Whether Kotelnik was watching and what he thought of all this remains unlearned, but if nothing else Andriy is accustomed to fighting in the face of hometown hype. Remember, just 13 months ago Kotelnik was fighting Amir Khan in Manchester.

In addition to the aforementioned events at City Hall and Rams Park, the 140-pound champion threw out the first pitch before the Cardinals' game against the Astros at Busch Stadium Wednesday night.

To fully appreciate the significance of this, two things should be remembered. One is that at the height of his own popularity, Spinks and his posse used to walk around dressed up like a Cardinals' fan club. Now the "little brother" even appears to have co-opted Cory's baseball allegiance.

It should also be noted that when Cunningham shouted across the ring and ordered Devon "Throw the *uppercut!*" in the eighth round of the unification fight against Juan Urango at the Mohegan Sun back in March, he did so from beneath a red Cardinals' cap. Devon donned his own Cardinals cap about three seconds after Benjy Estevez rescued Urango, and was wearing it when he was interviewed by Max Kellerman. In the television booth at Busch Stadium Wednesday night, Alexander was interviewed by Al Hrabosky. His body language suggested that Devon considered the Mad Hungarian an upgrade from Max, but hey, that's the way things are in The Lou.