Written by JE Grant
Wednesday, 07 December 2005 19:00

In recent months we have turned the microscope on the strange activities of the world sanctioning bodies. This is no investigation that relies on anonymous sources or interviews with disgruntled ex-employees. One needs only to examine the public actions of almost any of the organizations. View their websites. Read their rules. Then compare what they say and what they do. We don't need to eavesdrop or conduct late-night operations to see the peculiarity of their doings.

For other oddities on the workings of sanctioning bodies of late see the following articles: WBC makes Toney mandatory in bizarre ruling
and
An insult to my intelligence
.

In the piece below we take a look at the upcoming IBF middleweight world title bout between Arthur Abraham and Kingsley Ikeke. You read that right, a "world" title fight. You know without a doubt that Jermain Taylor is the undisputed king of the middleweights. His two title fights with Bernard Hopkins settled the issue.

How then, can the IBF see any fight that doesn't include Taylor as being for a world championship?

Everyone in the boxing world was well aware that Saturday night the undisputed middleweight championship of the world was on the line as Taylor and Hopkins engaged in close quarters combat in Las Vegas. Right? Wrong.

No, it seems there is a dispute as to who the "world champion" is.

The International Boxing Federation, for reasons known only to the chieftains of that squeaky clean sanctioning body, have deemed that this Saturday in Leipzig, Germany, Abraham and Ikeke will vie for the New Jersey-based sanctioning organization's vacant title.

Let's leave to the side for a moment that a group of men and women could somehow conclude that by facing Hopkins, Taylor was fighting someone who was of lesser qualification than either Abraham or Ikeke – we'll come back to that later.

Focus for now on the relative worthiness of Abraham and Ikeke to be in a title contest. The starting point of the evaluation is the IBF's ratings.

First, neither fighter is rated number one in the organization. Sam Soliman is number one, Ikeke's number two and Abraham is number four. Number three, and excluded from the title picture, is none other than Winky Wright, a recent winner over Felix Trinidad and a two-time conqueror of Shane Mosley.

So what have Soliman and Wright done to find themselves on the outside? They had the temerity to sign to fight each other on December 10th. That's right, the number one and the number three contenders are not qualified to fight for the belt. Neither fighter is squawking because they're fully aware that the big cash will come by fighting Taylor.

Wright is number one in the latest WBC and WBA ratings. Soliman is number four in the WBC ratings, and unrated by the WBA (in the top 15 of the organization's published ratings). A win over Wright – though highly unlikely – would almost undoubtedly lead to a bout with Taylor.

Of course there is not much squawking from the Hopkins camp either. He, as an officer of Golden Boy Promotions, is happy to see one of his charges, Ikeke, fighting for any kind of belt. You see, the Nigerian, 23-1 (13 KOs), recently signed with the company.

Abraham, an Armenian living in Germany, has amassed a respectable record of 18-0 (16 KOs). His decision win over Howard Eastman, a consensus top-10 fighter, is his only noteworthy victory.

In any case, however significant his win over Eastman, it is not at all clear how the IBF could have decided that he is better than Hopkins. It should be noted that Hopkins' first title, and the only belt he defended all 20 times, was the IBF's. Included in that list of victims was Eastman. (Hopkins is number two in the latest WBA and WBC ratings behind Wright, and number two in the WBO ratings behind, gulp, Felix Sturm.)

Even more astounding is the fact that Hopkins is not rated anywhere in the organization's top 15 (though you will find such stalwarts as Evans Ashira, a recent loser to a one-handed Joe Calzaghe, for the WBO super-middleweight belt).

For his part, Ikeke gained his spot with a recent victory over Antwun Echols. You may remember Echols from his title shot against Hopkins in which he was stopped in 10 rounds.

Of course while Wright's bona fides are above reproach, it is useful to look at the Australian Soliman's record to find out just how he squirmed ahead of not only Wright, but also Hopkins and everyone else on the planet.

He gained a victory in an eliminator over Raymond Joval. It has to be noted that Joval has never defeated a consensus top-10 fighter. In fact, his primary claim to fame is winning a couple of rounds against Fernando Vargas, while losing a clear-cut decision.

Soliman, Wright, Ikeke and Abraham are solid contenders (Wright of course is a proven world champion). But, only Wright has fought the best available fighters and proven himself worthy of mention in the same breath as Hopkins and Taylor.

The trouble in the ratings – as we discussed in the article about the WBC's leapfrogging of James Toney into a "mandatory" slot – is that the organizations are exponentially widening their credibility gap – if they ever had any.

Before anyone says that it does not matter, we should all consider that the sanctioning bodies are reaping huge windfalls of money from their various title fight and eliminator fees (a subject that we will take up in the near future). This is a consumer issue, and is undoubtedly detrimental to the general health of the sport.