ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. (December 12, 2006) – The fight to determine the best middleweight in the world took a major step forward today when Jose Sulaiman, president of the World Boxing Council (WBC), served notice to the camps of middleweight champion Jermain Taylor and mandatory challenger Winky Wright.

According to Sulaiman, “the free negotiations period has begun for the mandatory title defense between our champion Jermain Taylor vs. mandatory challenger Ronald 'Winky' Wright, as ordered during the WBC annual convention in Spain during the month of October. If no agreement is reached, the WBC will order a purse offer to be held on January 20, 2006, in Mexico City."

"I am extremely pleased,” replied Wright, “with the WBC's decision to proceed with the mandatory title defense and I look forward to meeting Jermain head-on in the ring in my next fight. Everyone knows that after every fight, I have always asked for another big fight. No breathers for me. I only want the biggest fights against the best fighters because I am a competitor and I believe a champion should act like a champion. Now we are going to see who the best middleweight really is – Jermain Taylor or me."

Wright and Taylor finished No. 1 and No. 3 respectively as the top boxing pay-per-view draws for 2005.

Wright, 50-3 (25 KOs), won his second consecutive world title elimination bout Saturday night, with a dominating 12-round unanimous decision over Sam Soliman, 31-8 (12 KOs), at the Mohegan Sun and televised live on HBO, snapping the IBF's top-rated middleweight contender's three-year, 19-bout winning streak.

Wright – who already was the No. 1 contender in the WBC and WBA by virtue of his world title elimination bout victory over Felix Trinidad on May 14 (Trinidad entered that fight as the WBC/WBA No. 1-rated middleweight contender) – solidified his position as Taylor's mandatory challenger and is now recognized as the division's undisputed No. 1 contender. A two-time world champion, and the only man to unify the three major championship titles in the 154-pound division, Wright extended his current winning streak to 11 bouts, dating back to his disputed majority decision loss to Fernando Vargas in 1999.