

A Black Eye That Can Be Healed.

Written by Steve Kim
Monday, 12 January 2004 21:00

Last week the headlines blared, 'De La Hoya-Mosley Fixed?' as the feds went into the offices of Top Rank in Las Vegas on Tuesday night and left with computer records, financial documents and fight tapes.

An unnamed member of the FBI had told a reporter from the New York Daily News that they had some evidence that September's rematch between Shane Mosley and Oscar De La Hoya was rigged.

Sorry, but that's just a smokescreen to illicit bigger headlines on this 20-month investigation into the dealings of one of boxing's major promotional outfits. Oh, yes, there are fixed fights involved, but it has nothing to do with that particular fight.

Think about it, a 20-month investigation for a fight that took place about four months ago? It's an even more dubious claim when it was Mosley who won the fight, not Top Rank's fighter, De La Hoya. There was absolutely no upside for Top Rank or for the business of boxing in a Mosley victory. If this fight was rigged(which it wasn't), it sure was a poor job of execution I'd say.

In fact, Bob Arum, the CEO of Top Rank was so outraged by the outcome of that fight, not only did he promise to leave the sport, he and De La Hoya called for an investigation of the fight. Hey, be careful of what you wish for, I guess.

But the crux of this investigation and this raid really centers on the action of Arums employees and associates. From head matchmaker Bruce Trampler, Sean Gibbons, Cameron Dunkin, Pete Sousens and manager Bob Mittleman, all sorts of malfeasance has been uncovered. From fixed fights, altered medical records, funny bookkeeping, drug trafficking and bribing judges, what comes out of this probe will shock observers.

One of the major subjects of this investigation centers around a fight involving Joey Torres, who after more than two decades in prison for a murder he says he did not commit, made his pro debut under the Top Rank banner on April 27th, 2002, after being paroled.

Torres, was used by Arum's organization to sell tickets to their show which was taking place at the Anaheim Pond. His story of reclamation was something that was pushed hard by the Top Rank public relations staff, who was able to get Torres on various media outlets across the country.

Torres, was slated to fight an Oklahoman by the name of Perry Williams, who not-so-coincidentally, had Sean Gibbons in his corner. The fight itself was a farce. Williams after knocking down Torres in the opening seconds of the bout, would proceed to not throw another meaningful punch the rest of the fight until he flat out laid down in the second round.

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Yes, a guy that was there to throw a fight, had nearly scored a knockout. And up to that point, I thought I had seen it all. But the crowd recognized the sham that had taken place and booed lustily. Eventually, Torres would call it a career and work his way into the Top Rank circles.

How you may ask? Well, somehow, while behind bars, Torres had struck up a friendship with professional athletes like Paul Molitor and Eric Davis. Trampler, a known baseball aficionado, was drawn to Torres and the contacts he had. Pretty soon, Torres has brought his cousin 'Big Franky' from New York inside the inner realm of Top Rank. Hearing stuff nobody else heard, knowing about things that nobody else had knowledge off.

It turns out that they were both working for the feds undercover. And from that time in May of 2002, to now, they had wires, video surveillance and other incriminating evidence against Top Rank. This truly was boxing's version of Donny Brasco.

I've been told that more than 20 indictments will be forthcoming and you know some of these characters involved will be chirping at the first sign of heat. And there are already stories coming out from the likes of Mitchell Rose that he was offered a bribe to take a dive against Butterbean in 1995. For all intents and purposes, it could be the end of Top Rank boxing. Even if this company does survive this storm, what credibility could it possibly have?

And of course, some in the media have trotted out that tired old line of this being another 'black eye' for the sport of boxing.

Perhaps, but it's certainly not the end of it. To the contrary, this could be the seminal moment in time when real changes and reform takes place. People in the sport always give lip service about wanting to clean up this business- but the reality is that they don't because that would mean they themselves would have to comply with changes that might not suit them- but now this could be the impetus where the sport takes a real step to right it's wrongs.

If this game is truly serious about changing it's protocol and it's image, this is the perfect place to start. Arum, despite his own checkered history had time and time again painted himself as the victim to the evil and corrupt Don King. Well, it turns out that his own organization was probably just as corrupt and deceitful as he made King's organization to be.

You could just hear King bellowing, "LIGHTS ARE OUT IN ARUMVILLE!!!" And what will be interesting is how the media- how has largely given Arum a free pass despite his own unsavory past, while persecuting King at any cost- will cover the upcoming events. It simply hasn't been convenient to call out Arum, while focusing largely on King as the symbol for what ill's boxing.

But now this is a pivotal time for the game. This is a perfect time and place for true change and for this game to be taken seriously once again by the general populace. If the status quo exists

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after what has happened and what will soon become public, then maybe, just maybe, the game doesn't deserve to be taken seriously, then.

This could be the end of Top Rank. And a new beginning for boxing.