LITTLE ROCK, Ark. --- Amid whoops of “Woo Pig Sooey!” from his hometown audience, Jermain Taylor scaled in at 159½ pounds and immediately bolted for the nearest restaurant, putting to rest fears that the middleweight champion might somehow be adversely affected by having yesterday’s weigh-in delayed an extra three hours.

Originally scheduled for 1 pm, yesterday’s weigh-in was rescheduled for 4:00 after the World Boxing Council notified the Arkansas Commission that the organization’s guidelines required that the ritual take place no more than 30 hours in advance of the scheduled title fight.

The widespread impression had been that the commission had bowed to the wishes of promoter Lou DiBella in scheduling the early weigh-in, but Arkansas chairman Gary Heral insisted that his body wasn’t trying to help stack the deck for Taylor.

“We had been under the impression that the rule allowed for 36 hours, but it turned out that was the old rule,” said Heral. “We certainly didn’t want to give the impression that we were being favorable to either of the participants.”

After Taylor made the weight with ease, there followed a few anxious moments in which Ouma failed to materialize. The Ugandan challenger showed up only a few minutes late, but since by then Taylor had already fled in search of sustenance, waiting photographers were unable to capture any traditional nose-to-nose weigh-in posturing.

Ouma, whose arrival was delayed because he was being examined by a commission doctor, weighed 158¾, easily the heaviest he has ever been for a professional bout.

Although all of Taylor’s titles (he also holds the WBO 160-pound belt, in addition to being recognized as the WBA ‘super-champion’) will be on the line Saturday night at the Alltel Arena, the WBC is the lead sanctioning body, appointing the officials as well as implementing the first-ever US test of the organization’s new system of modified open scoring.

The running tallies of the ringside judges will be announced after the fourth and eighth rounds -- if the fight lasts that long.

The trio of Tom Kaczmarek, Sergio Silvi, and Jack Woodburn will judge Taylor-Ouma, as well as the Emanuel Augustus-Russell Jones undercard fight, in which the coveted WBC Continental Americas junior welterweight title will be at stake.

Silvi is Italian, Woodburn from Canada. The WBC had initially appointed Harold Laurens of Curacao to the panel, but when Homeland Security failed to approve Laurens’ visa, the veteran Kaczmarek was summoned from New Jersey.

Michigan referee Frank Garza will be the third man in the ring for the championship fight, as well

as for Augustus-Jones. Laurence Cole of Texas has been appointed to work several undercard bouts, somewhat to the chagrin of Gary Heral.

“If I had realized at the time he was the same referee who worked the Marquez-Jaca fight two weeks ago I never would have approved him,” said the Arkansas commission chairman.

After Marquez was cut in that WBO featherweight title bout, Cole employed his own version of Open Scoring, approaching the champion’s corner and (erroneously believing he had covered up the microphone) informed him that he was “ahead on the scorecards,” essentially inviting him to quit and take the technical win. (Marquez, to his credit, didn’t take Cole up on his offer.)

“I was watching that fight on television and I couldn’t believe what I was hearing,” said Heral. “It was outrageous.”

Promoter DiBella was pressed into service yesterday as the “Duckmaster” at the Little Rock Peabody, the host hotel for the fight. In keeping with a tradition begun at the parent hotel in Memphis, the resident flock of mallards is marched down from their rooftop roost to spend the day in a fountain in the hotel lobby. Armed with a duck-tipped cane, DiBella led the way.

But domesticated ducks are more suggestible than Arkansas fight fans, and the promoter may need to rely on his cane again tomorrow night to bludgeon the locals toward the doors of the Alltel Arena, where the advance sale suggests DiBella could be looking at half a house in the 17,000-seat building. Although Taylor’s hometown fights have done well in the past, tickets for this one were scaled to a $650 top, with tickets in the upper deck still priced at $150.