

NEW YORK---The most preposterous thing at the Manhattan Center's Grand Ballroom Thursday night wasn't even that Balboa-esque hat promoter Lou DiBella was walking around in.

DiBella, after all, has a promotional tie-in with the new "Rocky" movie, which has sponsored several of his recent boxing shows. At least he had an excuse for looking ridiculous.

The New York State Athletic Commission, on the other hand, ought to know better.

For reasons chairman Ron Scott Stevens has not been able to satisfactorily explain, the NYSAC agreed to sanction the co-featured bout between Staten Island's Gary Stark and former Philippine junior bantamweight champion Vernie Torres as for the "New York State junior featherweight title."

Now, this isn't brain surgery. The requirements for fighting for the New York State junior featherweight title would seem to be fairly elementary in nature. A man needs only be two things: a junior featherweight, and from New York.

Torres qualified on the former count (although he'd never fought above bantamweight before) but clearly not on the second. He was born and raised (and spent much of his career fighting) in the Philippines, is domiciled in Florida, and currently trains in Los Angeles. Exactly one of his 34 previous fights even took place in the Empire State – a first-round round KO of Eduardo Manzano on the Roy Jones-David Telesco card at Radio City Music Hall half a dozen years ago.

On the other hand, the NYSAC can take some comfort in the knowledge that they're not alone in this goofy practice. Torres once also fought for a WBC 'Latin American' title, even though the closest he'd ever been in his life to Latin America was Miami.

Hey, Sports Illustrated once named a horse its "Sportsman of the Year," an honor which would no doubt have met with the NYSAC's approval.

If Laila Ali, say, lost to a man, would he become the WBC Women's Champion?

In New York, perhaps.

(Nor does an example cited as a precedent by Ron Scott Stevens – the 1968 fight between Joe Frazier and Buster Mathis Sr. for the New York version of the World Heavyweight title – hold up to scrutiny. Although the NYSAC did sanction that fight in which neither boxer was from New York, it was in theory for a 'world' title, one which in New York's eyes lay vacant because in fact the NYSAC itself had led the charge to strip Muhammad Ali of recognition the moment he refused to take that forward step at a Houston induction center.

Broadway Boxing, RSS and the NYSAC

Written by George Kimball

Thursday, 14 December 2006 19:00

By the same tortured logic through which Torres was allowed to compete for a New York title, Curtis Stevens can lay claim to the light-heavyweight championship of Wisconsin's Menominee Tribe this morning after knocking out Jonathan (The Native Sensation) Corn in the main event of DiBella's final Broadway Boxing card of 2006.

Stevens, a last-minute sub when scheduled headliner Sechew Powell fell out, took the bout on short notice, and with the victory wound up winning his third fight in a 30-day span.

Corn brought a 46-15-2 record to New York, but apart from a few trips to across the Atlantic to lose to Europeans, most of his fighting has been done in Midwestern tribal casinos, and he clearly wasn't in Stevens' league.

Stevens took it to him right from the opening bell, and confessed to being overanxious. Although he had Corn hurt several times in the first, the opponent made it through the round, but in the second, said Stevens, "I was able to settle down."

A pair of left hooks put Corn down, and when he arose Stevens moved in to thud two more hard left hooks off his head. As Corn sagged against the ropes, Stevens teed off, landing at least four solid right hands before referee Eddie Claudio intervened to rescue the noble savage at 2:34 of the second.

"Three wins in 30 days," said DiBella. "That's a real old-school performance."

Stevens had begun the one-month skein by avenging his only career loss by outpointing Marcos Primera ("Of course that loss bothers me," said Stevens. "It's always going to be on my record) and two weeks earlier had won the New York State light-heavyweight title with a win over Dhafir Smith (who is, incidentally, from Pennsylvania) on his way to the Manhattan Center.

"I didn't mind taking the fight on such short notice," said Stevens, now 16-1. "I'm always in shape and always training, so I was ready to go."

Thursday night's card also marked the Broadway Boxing debut of middleweight James McGirt Jr., who it turns out is not exactly a chip off the old block. McGirt fils took up boxing after a collegiate basketball career, and to this day is built more like a basketball player than a boxer. (Father/trainer Buddy, on the other hand, is built like, well, a basketball.)

McGirt's opponent, New Jerseyite Dennis Sharpe, was fighting his second consecutive southpaw, having gone the distance in losing to Ireland's Andy Lee on the Wladimir Klitschko-Calvin Brock card at Madison Square Garden last month, and proved more difficult than McGirt had anticipated.

Although McGirt won handily on the scorecards (80-72 on those of Frank Lombardi and Carlos Ortiz, 79-73 on Tony Paolillo's; the Sweet Science had it somewhat closer at 77-75), it was clear that if DiBella hopes to turn young McGirt into a crowd-pleasing ticket-seller he's going to have his work cut out for him.

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McGirt acknowledged as much.

“I wasn’t expecting Sharpe to come in as tough as he did,” said McGirt after the pedestrian performance. “It was my fault. I was a little lackadaisical because I was expecting an easy fight.”

Although he was never hurt, Sharpe was able to hit McGirt a lot more than he should have, and when McGirt did land he didn’t seem to pack much of a wallop. Neither man was ever remotely in trouble.

McGirt raised his record to 15-0 with the win, and has already been penciled in for a berth on the undercard of DiBella’s February Boxing After Dark card at the Hammerstein Ballroom, which will be headlined by Paulie Malignaggi-Edner Cherry and Powell vs. Ishe Smith.

Sharpe, in absorbing his third straight loss, dropped to 17-4-1.

The possibility that Vernie Torres might make things awkward for the NYSAC never reared its ugly head. Controlling the bout from start to finish, Stark won every round on the scorecards of Lombardi, Ortiz, and Paolillo. All three judges had it 100-89, as did the Sweet Science; referee Ricky Gonzalez docked Torres a point for hitting behind the head in the ninth.)

Although Stark thoroughly battered Torres, using mostly his right hand to score with a debilitating series of body shots and uppercuts, punctuated by the occasional crisp right to the jaw, he was never able to put him down, which could prove worrisome somewhere down the road. Torres is, to be sure, resilient and difficult to damage, but Stark repeatedly hit him with everything he had and never put a dent in him, leading to the inescapable conclusion that the Staten Island Kid can’t break an egg.

“He can’t,” conceded DiBella. “But Gary Stark became a contender tonight.”

The more Stark smacked Torres, a onetime Roy Jones protégé, the more he’d grin, even though he took some pretty severe punishment all night long.

Torres was nicked above the left eye in the first, and sported a big knotty welt around the eye by the sixth. He was bleeding from the nose by the seventh, but he just kept grinning – and losing.

It was the second loss in a row for Torres (27-8), who lost to Jose Navarro at the Mohegan Sun back in May, while Stark marched on at 16-0.

“I’d love to put him in with (IBF champion) Steve Molitor,” said DiBella.

Problem is, Stark isn’t ranked, and a win over what’s left of Vernie Torres probably isn’t going to change that.

“The quickest way to get him ranked (by the IBF),” said DiBella, would be a fight against Mike Oliver, the Hartford boxer who is the USBA champ at the weight.

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“We’d fight Oliver – but in New York, not in New England,” the promoter quickly added.

Stark apparently had more pressing concerns. Moments after conquering Torres, he was asked before leaving the ring “What’s next?”

“I’m having sex,” replied Stark.

Once-beaten Brooklyn cruiserweight Shaun George made short work of Cleveland opponent Roosevelt Johnson (5-9-1), knocking him out 2:41 into the first round. George first decked Johnson with a painful left hook to the midsection, and when he arose landed a solid left hook to the jaw, a punch so devastating that referee Eddie Claudio had waved the fight off before Johnson even landed on the floor. George, whose only loss came via a first-round TKO to Matt Godfrey Foxwoods back in May, improved to 13-1-2 with the win.

Bronx junior lightweight Maureen Shea won a third-round TKO over Mexican Rocio Vasquez, with referee Sparkle Lee stopping the action at 57 seconds of the round. Shea, who rejoined ranks of the undefeated after her May loss to Kim Colbert was changed to No Contest, improved, officially, to 8-0. It was the fifth consecutive loss for Vasquez (6-5), who weighed 106 when she posted her last win two years ago. (She weighed 126½ for Shea.)

In another early bout, Newark welterweight Tolan Tascoe climbed off the floor from a second-round knockdown to win a close but unanimous (38-37 on all three cards) decision over Eusebio Flores of Corona, Queens in a fight that represented the pro debut for both contestants.

Attended by a vocal rooting section, Brooklyn junior featherweight Robert Semidel recorded his second win in as many pro fights, outpointing debutante Harvey Phillips of Cleveland over four rounds, with all three judges scoring it 40-36 for the winner.

Atlantic City middleweight Patrick Majewski (2-0) knocked out Ken Dunham of Charlotte, NC in the curtain-raiser. Dunham (1-2) had battled split Jamelle Hamilton to a split decision in the same ring a month earlier.

BROADWAY BOXING
MANHATTAN CENTER
NEW YORK CITY
DECEMBER 14, 2006

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS: Curtis Stevens, 172, Brownsville, NY TKO’d Jonathan Corn, 172, Keshena, Wisc. (2)

CRUISERWEIGHTS: Shaun George, 190, Brooklyn, NY KO’d Roosevelt Johnson, 190, Cleveland, Ohio (1)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS: James McGirt Jr., 160, Brentwood, NY dec. Dennis Sharpe, 159¾, Bayonne, NJ (8)

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Patrick Majewski, 159, Atlantic City, NJ KO'd Ken Dunham, 158³/₄, Charlotte, NC (1)

WELTERWEIGHTS: Tolan Tascoe, 145³/₄, Newark, NJ dec. Eusebio Flores, 147, Queens, NY (4)

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHTS: Maureen Shea, 127¹/₂, Bronx, NY TKO'd Rocio Vazquez, 126 ¹/₂, Ciudad Acuna, Mex. (3)

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHTS: Gary Stark, 122, Staten Island dec. Vernie Torres, 121³/₄, Davao, Philippines (10) (Starks wins vacant New York State title)

Robert Semidei Jr., 120, Brooklyn, NY dec. Harvey Phillips, 116¹/₂, Cleveland, Ohio (4)