Written by Rick Folstad
Tuesday, 19 November 2002 21:00

Just who does the IBF think they're messing with? This is Roy Jones Jr., they're talking about. This is the Big Cheese, the Top Dog, the Man of All Seasons. He's a rap singer, record maker, practice-team hoopster, fight manager, TV colorman, fisherman and light-heavyweight champeen of the entire planet. If this guy asks for an exemption from his light-heavyweight championship duties so he can wander off and fight heavyweight John Ruiz, you give it to him. You don't ask questions.

You don't dilly-dally. You don't blink hard. You hand it to him with a polite bow and your best wishes, preferably on a silver platter.

But the IBF decided that maybe they don't really need to bow down in front of Roy Boy. They don't have to pick their words, make excuses or stall for time. If Jones doesn't want to defend his title against mandatory challenger Antonio Tarver - and he had until late Monday to decide - fine. He can join the land of the heavies and take his title belt or belts with him.

In case you haven't been listening, Jones asked the IBF if he could skip the mandatory against Tarver and go directly to the heavyweight fight with Ruiz. More money for a Ruiz fight.

After scratching its head and consulting a higher power - the legal department - the IBF replied, "Sure, Roy, do what you want. You always do. But if you don't fight Tarver, you will no longer be the IBF champ."

That's because the IBF, in order to determine who the light-heavyweight champion of the world is, has the crazy idea that certain criteria must be met. Most important among those stipulations is that - get this - to win the light heavyweight title, you have to be a light-heavyweight and you have to BEAT a light-heavyweight. And John Ruiz kissed the light-heavyweight division good-bye when he was 14.

Can you believe these guys at the IBF? Where do they come up with this stuff? Pretty soon, they're going to insist that fighters defending their world title actually weigh-in at that specific weight. In other words, if you're fighting for the junior-welterweight championship, at some point in the days leading up to your fight, you actually have to weigh 140 pounds. If you weigh, say, 145 pounds at the weigh-in, you can't really defend the 140-pound title.

Wow.

So why Roy will apparently move up to fight the heavyweights for more money - and I don't think anyone here can blame him - Tarver is probably throwing a party right about now. He gets to fight another top contender - probably light-heavyweight Montell Griffin - for the vacant title Jones no longer seems too worried about.

"I was surprised," Griffin told Boxingtalk.com after the ruling by the IBF. "But I'm happy."

I would think so. Unless Jones changes his mind about fighting Tarver, Montell has moved to the front of the line leading to the light-heavyweight championship. The only guy blocking the door is Tarver It would have been easy for the IBF to give Jones the exemption, but it also would have been unfair to both Griffin and Tarver. Tarver would have been shut out from fighting Jones for the IBF title until the last half of next year Same with Griffin. He was looking at 2004 before he'd get a shot at winning the IBF title.

"If Jones had received the exemption, the (IBF) title would have been stagnant for probably 11 months," said Dan Goossen, Griffin's promoter. "And if Roy Jones is successful against Ruiz, what direction is he going to take? Is he going to stay in the lucrative heavyweight division?

"The IBF did not make their decision based on money. They made their decision based on the best interest of boxing."

Just who does Roy Jones think he's messing with?