

NJ Commish Larry Hazzard Dumped...Why?

Written by Michael Woods

Thursday, 15 November 2007 19:00

After 22 years on the job, well-regarded New Jersey Athletic Control Board commissioner Larry Hazzard was kicked to curb, unceremoniously, by state Attorney General Anne Milgram on Wednesday.

Hazzard served as commissioner of the Athletic Control Board since 1985.

Hazzard, a three-time champion in the Golden Gloves competitions for amateur boxers, highly regarded professional boxing referee, and black belt in Jiu Jitsu, was known for taking matters into his own hands, and stepping on to the apron to halt a one-sided affair.

He has drawn tepid criticism in the past for liking the spotlight a bit too much for some people's taste, and injecting himself into events by leaping on to the apron, and calling a halt to one sided bouts.

Deputy commissioner Sylvester Cuyler will be acting commissioner until a replacement is chosen.

Hazzard has responded, and called the move "retaliation" for his writing to NJ Gov. Jon Corzine and detailing what he deemed were shoddy practices by commission employees.

Hazzard put his foot down regarding "employee's decisions to sanction mismatches in mixed martial arts contests, to okay a fighter who failed to test negative for HIV and to allow promoters to "shop" for medical approvals for their fighters," according to the Newark Star Ledger's Franklin McNeil and Rick Hepp.

The plot thickens more, and a potential storyline emerges when Hazzard's attorney, according to the newspaper, referenced a "decision by the Attorney General's Office to transfer 'an individual with no experience' to the state Athletic Control Board by creating a new title that paid \$90,000 a year."

This allegation could indicate that Hazzard was canned for standing up to an egregious example of cronyism, if in fact his attorney's charge is correct.

Milgram has stated that the decision to fire Hazzard didn't stem from a stance of retribution.

But so far, the AG hasn't released any concrete reason why Hazzard was dumped.

Middleweight legend Bernard Hopkins has entered the fray, and released a letter backing Hazzard.

Says Hopkins: "I am shocked and appalled at the decision by the New Jersey States Attorney General Anne Milgram and her office to dismiss Larry Hazzard from his services as

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long-standing head of the New Jersey State Athletic Commission. I am standing up to renounce this decision and I encourage all members of the boxing community—fighters, trainers, judges, promoters, commissioners, television networks, and the media—to join me in protesting this decision.

What's most disturbing is that they not only did they do this the same day he buried his 41-year old nephew, but they also admitted that "Commissioner Hazzard did nothing wrong. It was just time for a change." (Atlantic City Press, Nov. 16.) This might be a change that they needed but it is certainly not a change that boxing needs. We were just fine with Larry Hazzard as a leader in our sport.

Larry Hazzard for the past 22 years has run one of, if not the most, efficient and ethical Commissions in boxing. From a fighter's viewpoint, he championed safety and welfare for all of us, whether we were champions or just four-round fighter. He was always looking to improve the sport and never feared speaking his mind for the greater good of boxing.

The bigger question here, and as far as I know, Ms. Milgram did not consult anyone within the boxing community to get opinions to base her decision on. Boxing is a difficult sport anyway and how are they going to be able to replace Larry Hazzard with someone who is as competent as he is? I have to use the old saying here, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

Please join me in expressing your outrage by contacting the State's Attorney General's office. You can write to 25 Market Street, Trenton, NJ, 08625-0080 or call 609-292-4925 or send an email to <http://www.nj.gov/oag/offices.htm> <<http://www.nj.gov/oag/offices.htm>> ."

It is certainly the AG's right to install her choice in the position, and put her stamp on the board. But one has to hope that this isn't a case of political payback.

Nothing has emerged to indicate that Hazzard wasn't performing his job in capable fashion. Certainly, the timing of the move leaves something to be desired, both on a personal basis--Hazzard was set to attend his nephew's funeral--and a professional one, as New Jersey plays host to a high profile boxing and MMA card on Saturday night, in AC and Newark, respectively.

As of right now, with the information we've been given, this move stinks, and the stench needs to be addressed.