

A HEAVYWEIGHT IMPLOSION

Written by Charles Jay
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As I mentioned previously, as long as the state of Wisconsin is thinking about investigating some of the suspicious circumstances surrounding their July 5 fight at the Menominee Bingo Casino, perhaps they need to look into something else.

What REALLY happened to that substitute opponent who was supposed to show up?

Ken Murphy, a Chicago fighter, was contacted at 3 PM the afternoon of the fight, and purportedly began driving to the Menominee Bingo Casino in Keshena, Wisc. in an attempt to get to the venue in time to step into the ring for the main event. However, Murphy supposedly got lost along the way, turning a 4-1/2-hour trip into something that lasted much, much longer.

According to Jim Thomas, who had talked to Murphy on his cell phone and who also kept closely abreast of matchmaker Eric Bottjer's contact with the fighter, which resulted in close to 40 phone calls in all, Murphy was coming up with some very strange answers to the questions that were being posed to him.

"He didn't seem to be able to tell us where he was at any time," said Thomas. "He wasn't able to read the signs on the highway. So we just asked him to read off numbers, and he could hardly even do that. One minute he was in Milwaukee, the next minute he was in Racine. He was supposedly at a place that was just about seven miles away from the casino, then on the next call he told us he was in Green Bay. I couldn't figure it out."

Teddy Atlas didn't know what to make of it either, as he told Steve Kim of MaxBoxing: "So we found out he's (Murphy) 45 minutes away. So we say 'OK, we're gonna be all right', then 45 minutes later, we find out he's an hour away, he got on the wrong road. It was just an odyssey of errors. It was something that if you put in the movies, they would think it was overkill or over the top."

While I have talked to several people who told me Murphy finally showed up as the card was ending, looking for his money, and that indeed sounded like a funny, ironic way for me to end my story, I have yet to speak to anyone who actually SAW Murphy on the premises.

And I'm wondering whether he ever left Chicago at all.

Think about it for a minute - it would be commonplace for someone who never set out on the highway in the first place to have a very difficult time coming up with plausible answers when queried, on a continuing basis, about his progress. Improvisation just doesn't happen that easily. And the erratic responses Murphy certainly give rise to a lot of doubt.

After all, if you're cruising around Chicago with a cell phone in your hand and someone is asking you which little town in Wisconsin you just passed, and you knew that person was

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most likely holding a road map in their hands, you'd probably tell them you couldn't read the signs, rather than get caught tripping over yourself.

And I don't care how dumb you may be. Anyone can pull into a gas station and ask directions if he's within 35 miles of a place, and find his way there.

The whole progression of Murphy's movements just doesn't pass the giggle test.

I'm sure I could talk to Murphy about it. I could talk to Bottjer. I could talk to Mittleman, I suppose. But I doubt very seriously those conversations would bring me any closer to the truth. And I'm not sure I could necessarily "bank on" the word of anyone else who was up there who I haven't talked to already. So that leaves me with a gut feeling.

But it's a gut feeling that makes some sense.

Remember, Murphy had been on the phone with Mittleman earlier. And Mittleman, who has booked Murphy into overseas fights previously, had a VERY strong interest in Murphy not showing up. That's because if Murphy shows, he (Mittleman) probably doesn't get paid. As we know by now, Robert Mittleman would do ANYTHING, legal or illegal; moral, immoral, or amoral, to get paid. It wouldn't be outside the realm of possibility that Mittleman and Williams may have gotten together, decided to give Murphy \$1500 or so to "get lost", with the promise that he would be booked into some fight, overseas or elsewhere, next month.

My own feeling is that, at the very least, Murphy may have left Chicago and Mittleman exerted some "influence" on the progress of that trip, which ultimately made Murphy "unavailable".

There's a point to be made here, and it has very little to do with the Ali Act. It has little to do with the Professional Boxer Safety Act. And it has nothing to do with any legislation we think should be in place.

But if I'm the commission - and this should apply to ANY commission - and this is just my fourth fight card during all of 2002, AND I had a show with the biggest name who had fought in my state this year, AND there was a venue I wanted to preserve just for the sake of keeping boxing alive in the state, AND the guy who was supposed to come and very possibly save a fight card got lost under some extremely suspicious circumstances, I'd want to know if someone, who has LIED on the state application for licensure, had something to do with that. I'd want to discipline that individual, and anyone else who participated in it. I'd want to send the word out about this individual to all the other state commissions, so they can decide what action to take on their own - hopefully upholding, with my STRONG recommendation, whatever disciplinary action I decided to impose.

You know what that's called?

It's called BOXING REFORM. One step at a time.

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Next up: What should be learned from this whole episode?

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