

## HIJACKING IN THE HOOSIER STATE

Written by Charles Jay  
Monday, 15 July 2002 18:00

---

As of the close of business on Friday, Jacob Hall, a member of the Indiana Boxing Commission, was confident that he had a problem of great concern put to rest - that is, the matter of assigning officials for this Saturday night's WBC welterweight title fight between Vernon Forrest and Shane Mosley.

It was verbally agreed, in a phone call between Hall and WBC president Jose Sulaiman ("He was very much a gentleman", said Hall), that Laurence Cole of Texas would serve as the referee, and that the judges would be Fred Jones and Gary Merritt, both of Indiana, and Jerry Roth of Nevada, who was inserted in place of Duane Ford, who had just recently worked the Barrera-Morales fight and was thus deemed to be unavailable by the WBC.

Hall, a 12-year veteran of the commission who had been appointed with the task of arranging for the officials on behalf of Indiana, was satisfied, and confident he could avoid the same problem that had taken place back in May of 2000, when, in one of the most shameful actions in the sport of boxing in recent memory, the WBC threatened to pull its sanction FIFTEEN MINUTES before Roy Jones Jr.'s light heavyweight title defense against Richard Hall, unless the commission were to remove one of its Indiana-based judges and replace him with David Harris, a judge from Texas who just so happened to have been sent to Indianapolis in advance by Sulaiman.

At THAT particular time, the panic button went off, and commission chairman Bill Kelsey rolled over for the WBC.

On Monday morning, Kelsey did it again.

In a meeting of the commission in which the voting on officials was expected to be a formality, Hall was effectively sandbagged by his colleagues.

In that meeting, Kelsey and another commissioner, Ed Treacy, voted to replace one of its own judges - Fred Jones - with Nevada judge Tony Castellano, thereby throwing the process into a state of chaos which might, before all is said and done, rival that of the Roy Jones-Richard Hall fight.

It is not known for certain how the campaign of Castellano specifically came alive, but the guess here is that it gathered steam well ahead of the meeting. According to Hall, the commission know little or nothing about Castellano's background. One can only speculate as to how much lobbying was done by the WBC behind Hall's back, or behind closed doors.

Hall told us that the group of officials who were finally settled upon late last week were not only approved by the WBC, as far back as June 7, but also met with no objection from the camps of either Mosley or Forrest; nor were there ANY objections from Kelsey or Treacy, prior to Monday's fateful meeting.

## HIJACKING IN THE HOOSIER STATE

Written by Charles Jay  
Monday, 15 July 2002 18:00

---

Then, suddenly, they were being treated to protests on the part of Al Hayman, a representative of Forrest, who "went on for about 35 minutes" about an objection to Jones, offering Castellano as the alternative, according to Hall.

"Information" such as this apparently influenced the commissioners, who then threw Fred Jones out of the fight.

TOTAL ACTION attempted to contact both Kelsey and Treacy on Monday afternoon; our purpose was not only to decipher the rationale behind the sudden change in their vote - after an agreement had seemingly been reached - but also to inquire as to how much knowledge they had to base this reversal on, particularly about the background and capabilities of Castellano.

Neither commissioner returned our phone calls.

Apparently, the root of the objection to Jones is two-fold: that he is considered to be "an IBF official", and in the words of one of the parties at the commission meeting, "inexperienced".

I find that to be an interesting contradiction - on the one hand, presumably Jones is not considered to have enough experience to be "qualified", according to the WBC, but on the other, he is judged to be experienced enough in the "system" to be an "IBF guy".

I simply don't buy that. The facts are that Fred Jones is neither. He has been a ringside judge for at least eight years, and has worked in seven IBF world championship fights. He would have operated more for the WBC, but after attending several seminars for the NABF, the WBC's "minor league", he received only one NABF assignment.

Malcolm Garrett, an Indiana promoter who was on hand at the commission meeting, said Jones "is an honest guy who is certainly not incapable of officiating at this fight."

The WBC appears to be very worried about the way its champion, Forrest, will be treated by officials who have had an IBF "association", considering the organization stripped Forrest of its version of the welterweight title in 2001, for choosing to fight Mosley instead of top contender Michele Piccirillo. They ultimately used that to leave Jones off its list of "qualified officials", leading to its ultimate objection.

However, that would appear to be another contradiction, in and of itself, as the other officials in this fight - Merritt and Roth - have served as judges at 46 IBF championship fights between them.

And if the WBC is implying that judges who have done a healthy number of IBF title fights would, as a matter of course, prejudice Forrest, or the WBC, in this matter, isn't that conceding that officials in general, and by nature, are biased in a political sense? And given the room for "lateral mobility" on the part of many officials from one sanctioning body to another, does that not also imply that there must undoubtedly be some WBC officials we

## HIJACKING IN THE HOOSIER STATE

Written by Charles Jay  
Monday, 15 July 2002 18:00

---

can't trust?

Why does an organization like the WBC feel that officials must exclusively belong to them? What kind of message does that send?

What does all of this tell us about the credibility of "championship-level" officials as a whole?

You can supply your own conclusions to that one.

Regarding Castellano, to refer to him as a "Nevada judge" is actually something of a misnomer. Yes, he LIVES in Nevada, but he doesn't WORK in Nevada, and hasn't since he moved to Las Vegas with his wife Carol (also a judge) several years ago. Castellano would seem to work exclusively for the WBC, and does so almost entirely in foreign countries, something which, at the very least, should give rise to further exploration on the part of the commission.

Another disturbing thing about the Monday commission meeting was that while the objections and suggestions of Hayman seem to have been digested, considered, and acted upon by the commissioners, there was no representative of Shane Mosley present (none seems to have been invited), giving this meeting the character of an "ex parte" proceeding.

It's reasonable to assume that once Mosley's people discover that the major objection on the part of the WBC was the way FORREST was going to be treated by the judges, and that the organization took pro-active steps to correct that, there will be considerable objection to any maneuvers - covert or otherwise - the WBC may have tried to execute. Whether anything can be done about it is another question.

Just as it did with the Jones fight, the WBC has threatened to pull its sanction for this bout. On June 26 - NINETEEN days after Hall had settled upon the referee and judges with Rex Walker, a WBC official - one of the WBC's attorneys, Gabriel Penagaricano, sent a letter to Kelsey in which he demanded that the Indiana commission replace two of the judges, and NOT use Jones, but a different official - to be selected from a special list of designees the organization provided.

The last line of Penagaricano's letter was this - "In the unfortunate and unwanted event that you opt for the selection of officials deemed by the WBC to be unqualified for the judging of this momentous match, you will leave the organization with no alternative but to withhold its sanction." Sent later that day was a list of officials deemed "qualified" by the WBC which included Merritt, but not Jones.

Six days later, an irate Tim Lueckenhoff, president of the Association of Boxing Commissions, fired off a forceful letter to Jose Sulaiman - the product of a collaboration with Hall and ABC lawyers - in which he castigated the WBC for its previous actions in the Jones fight, reaffirmed the qualifications of Fred Jones as a judge, and raised strong objection to the "requirement" that Indiana replace two judges, indicating that the WBC's

## HIJACKING IN THE HOOSIER STATE

Written by Charles Jay  
Monday, 15 July 2002 18:00

---

insistence in that regard "has the

appearance

of being premised upon: (1) a pervasive desire to perpetuate a 'reward' system for those ring officials who pay membership dues, conference fees and seminar fees to the WBC, or, worse, (2) a desire to control the outcome of a professional boxing match."

Perhaps the most important issue raised by Lueckenhoff was that the WBC had no authority or justification for its actions under Federal law.

Section 16 of the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act, under the title "JUDGES AND REFEREES", reads this way:

"No person may arrange, promote, organize, produce, or fight in a professional boxing match unless all referees and judges participating in the match have been certified and approved by the boxing commission responsible for regulating the match in the State where the match is held."

What this means, kids, is that the WBC actually has this whole thing ASS-BACKWARDS (with the emphasis on "ass"). It is not THEIR option to approve or disapprove of the officials installed by Indiana; it is actually INDIANA'S authority to approve or disapprove, and the WBC's wants and desires are strictly secondary.

This issue is something that states have struggled to establish authority over, and indeed, Lueckenhoff's letter seemed to have had the effect of creating a phone conversation which eventually produced the verbal agreement between Hall and Sulaiman. Going into the weekend, the judges - Jones, Merritt, and Roth - were solidly in place.

Those arrangements were thrown completely out of whack on Monday.

Effectively, the WBC had figured out a way to get in "through the back door".

And as a result of their subordination, two Indiana commissioners took one more giant step BACKWARD for boxing reform.

I wonder if they even realize what they've done.

Let me weigh in regarding the subject of "experienced officials". At this point, given the overriding political atmosphere that surrounds these selections, there is almost no other choice but to assume that politics and favoritism pervades the way judges look at these fights, to the point of distortion. Is it not patently obvious, to any judge the WBC appoints, that the organization has taken measures specifically to protect Forrest?

To my way of thinking, LACK of exposure to the dubious system by which judges are recruited, appointed, even trained, to officiate these title fights is in all probability an

## HIJACKING IN THE HOOSIER STATE

Written by Charles Jay  
Monday, 15 July 2002 18:00

---

ADVANTAGE, since those officials have not had as much of a chance to get "polluted" by that system.

As such, Fred Jones may just be the MOST qualified judge available.

Personally, as a boxing fan, a boxing writer, and an advocate of boxing reform, I'm certainly disappointed in Messrs. Kelsey and Treacy, and greatly distressed with the message the World Boxing Council is sending my way here.

But you know, when I take a look at some of the principal characters involved, I notice that the supervisor of the Jones fight two years ago (Gerry Bolen), the supervisor assigned to THIS fight (Mario Latraverse), and the liaison for Indiana with regard to officials (Rex Walker), are ALL executive officers and board members for - you guessed it - the North American Boxing Federation, the WBC's so-called "junior organization".

Gee, what a surprise.

fightpage@totalaction.com

Copyright 2002 Total Action Inc.