

FOR THE WBC, CONTROL AND PROFIT GO HAND-IN-HAND

Written by Charles Jay
Tuesday, 23 July 2002 18:00

The latest incident in Indiana, in which the World Boxing Council essentially, and successfully, hijacked the process of officiating the Vernon Forrest-Shane Mosley fight, has shed some more light on how the organization does business, especially as regards the motivation behind the selection of its judges and referees.

And it brings up questions as to whether an organization which, in fact, has a stake in the outcome of a fight should in fact have any say at all in who is going to determine that outcome.

What do I mean by that, you might ask?

Well, first of all, let's stipulate that the WBC is in business to make a profit, regardless of what they want you to believe their official designation is. A sanctioning body does not charge sanctioning fees on a percentage basis, with more money coming out of bigger purses, if they are not in business for profit.

And it's not hard to see where that profit motive can get in the way of what might be just and equitable.

Take an example - let's say Fighter A is the champion. He's making #3 million for a particular fight, and 3% of that purse is going to the WBC in the form of a sanctioning fee. If he wins his title defense, he's going to make \$10 million for his next fight, which will be a major showdown against another fighter, who might be making, say \$6 million. First, however, Fighter A is facing off against Fighter B, who is one of those guys who's probably #8 in the ratings, unknown, and making only about \$100,000 for his title challenge. If Fighter B wins, he'll be in bigger money, no doubt, but that bigger payday may be on the order of about \$1.5 million, not the considerably larger figure the more well-known Fighter A would get for moving on.

Now let's do some simple arithmetic - if Fighter A wins, the next fight will produce something in the neighborhood of \$480,000 for the WBC (3% of the combined purses of the two fighters). However, if Fighter B were to pull off the upset, his next fight might produce no more than \$2 million in purses, which would mean only \$60,000 in sanctioning fees to the WBC.

That's a difference of \$420,000, or SEVEN HUNDRED PERCENT in sanctioning fees.

Is anybody going to sit there with a straight face and tell me that wouldn't mean anything to the WBC? Would it mean something to YOU?

Now consider that when they are able to have their way, the WBC handpicks the judges that the officiating pool is selected FROM.

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Allegedly they include on their lists judges who have attended multiple seminars, where "uniformity" is taught in the methodology of scoring fights.

From a technical standpoint, I don't know exactly what is taught at these seminars. Nor do I care to know.

All I can tell you is that "uniformity" can mean a lot of different things.

There's no question that if a judge has gotten to the point where he is going to work in world championship fights, he would have worked on the local level for a certain period of time. Over that period of time he develops a certain philosophy.

Judges have different basic philosophies about them - some appreciate defense more than others. Some favor the "ring general". Many like to consider clean punches more than anything else. That's why you wind up with differing scores in fights - not only are the judges looking at the fight from different angles, they're looking at it from different philosophical perspectives as well.

Maybe this is healthy; maybe it isn't. It isn't necessarily the worst thing in the world for all judges to be using the same basic criteria, and to the same degree, when scoring a fight. I grant you that.

But should the methodology and/or philosophy be that which is CREATED by the likes of Jose Sulaiman & Co., that is, the very people who are in many cases, making the MOST PROFIT off the performance of one fighter in a championship bout?

I would think not.

Even so, I'm less concerned about than the fundamentals that are taught at these seminars, which I'm told are more or less the same no matter which sanctioning body you're talking about, than I am with what is taught OUTSIDE the seminars; that is, what is IMPLIED.

"They bring these promoters out and let you know how much they love them," one WBC judge told us. "They give them awards, introduce them at the dinners, and you look in the program book for the convention and can see who's buying the full-page ads. They make sure everybody gets the message."

The judge asked not to be identified. He's worried he'd never get any more work from the WBC, which tells you a little something about the way this business is done.

If you're going to be setting standards - standards which may, in many cases, determine who wins or loses fights - those standards should not be set by a sanctioning body, not by a PRIVATE enterprise, but by a regulatory agency that has, as a matter of law, a certain degree of PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY - whether you feel that agency is proficient or not. That means a state commission, or collection of state commissions (meaning the ABC), or a national regulatory apparatus.

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If the World Boxing Council has a financial incentive, and therefore is an INTERESTED PARTY in the outcome of a fight, why in the world should it have ANY degree of influence over the result? Can anybody answer that question for me in a way in which he wouldn't get laughed out of the room?

Just review the components of the whole process - the WBC is in a position where it controls the TRAINING of their officials and dictates the APPOINTMENT of those same officials, based on (by their own admission), their "past performances" in title fights. They don't want to allow officials who are registered with any other sanctioning body to work their fights. They require the officials to attend conventions at which they are not shy in telling you who their favorite promoters are. There are invariably going to be those promoters who can deliver the highest sanctioning fees, and deliver the most business to the organizations, and therefore those promoters will have the most visibility at the conventions at which many of these judging seminars take place.

And it's not much of a secret, to any of these judges, that those sanctioning fees increase, more often than not, when a "house fighter" controlled by one of those promoters wins a fight.

On top of all that, they also control the drug testing in those states in which law does not require it. That means that the WBC conducts the tests, and reserves the exclusive right to reveal or conceal the results of these tests. If a "house fighter" were to fail a drug test, the WBC could hold back that result if it so desired, and if it suited their purposes, and they wouldn't necessarily be violating the rules of the boxing commission. No one would ever know the difference.

I'll tell you this much - if I were betting on a fight, I could do a heck of a lot worse than have all these factors going in my favor.

With a financial stake in the outcome that is so easily definable, what's so different about the position of the WBC?

Really - and I'm not exaggerating - this may be worse than paying college basketball players to shave points, and it's MUCH easier to do.

That's because it's MUCH more self-contained, and therefore more controllable.

And that's what makes it so dangerous.

Senator McCain, are you listening?

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