

Written by Charles Jay  
Monday, 29 July 2002 18:00

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When the Association of Boxing Commissions convenes for its annual meeting this week in Miami, one of the items on the agenda will be the method by which to deal with officials. The problems that occurred between the WBC and the Indiana Commission in connection with the Forrest-Mosley fight have touched off a reaction that could very well result in the ABC's recommendation that the sanctioning bodies have no input at all into the officials (referees and judges) that are used in world championship fights.

One member of the ABC has told me, "We're not going to use any judges that are recommended by a sanctioning body." That statement is a little silly, for a couple of reasons - one, having that rule in place would probably prompt the sanctioning bodies to recommend officials they DON'T want to work in championship fights, and two, this would probably chase a lot of title fights out of the United States.

Are the sanctioning bodies in business to make money? Yes. Should they be subject to some kind of regulation, whether that be a by-product of licensing or registration? Yes, and in fact, they already are, by virtue of the Ali Act edict that they register ratings criteria, articles of incorporation, etc. with the Federal Trade Commission and the ABC. Should agencies that have some measure of public accountability, by law, in their jurisdictions have a major voice in the deployment of officials? Certainly. Do I think the entire process - the training of officials, the selection and appointment of officials, the evaluation of officials, administrative determinations (or "final orders"), drug testing, ratings, sanctioning decisions, AND the appeals process - should be controlled completely by an outside entity? No.

However, at the same time I think that, rather than either side go to one extreme or the other, the ideal way to do things would be to have a co-operative between the actual jurisdiction, whether it be a state commission or the ABC, and the sanctioning body.

Toward that end, let me suggest a couple of compromises:

The first one is simple - the parties (the state/ABC and sanctioning body) could flip a coin to see who gets the referee, and whoever doesn't will have the right to name two of the three judges, notwithstanding a reasonable objection by the other party.

Maybe that's TOO simple, and leaves too much room for interpretation. Here is the more involved - and perhaps more palpable - solution that I would propose:

\* For all title fights, the sanctioning organization would submit a list of recommended officials that would number no less than eight referees and 15-20 judges, to be done a minimum of 30 days prior to the fight.

\* This submission shall be to the commission which has jurisdiction over the fight. At that point, the commission would have the option of bringing in the Association of Boxing

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Commissions to consult with them on this selection process.

\* The judges submitted by the sanctioning body, if they are American, would be required to be licensed and working as a judge within a jurisdiction that is a member commission of the ABC (in almost all instances, this is the case), and as a matter of routine, would have a letter of recommendation sent by their commission to the ABC (obviously no commission would use an official they wouldn't recommend, would they?). This way, there should be no plausible objection to an official on the part of the ABC. After all, if a member commission trusts them, why shouldn't THEY?

\* Out of the recommended pool of officials, either of the contestants' camps has the option of eliminating from consideration a MAXIMUM of one referee and two judges, in much the same way an attorney can make peremptory challenges of jurors at a trial.

\* Then the jurisdiction handling the fight, in conjunction with the ABC if it so desires, will select, from the remaining names on the list, one referee for the fight and FOUR judges (three to work the fight, and one alternate, who will remain an alternate until such time as all three judges are finally settled upon).

\* Subsequent to that, if either camp has an objection to any official that is eventually designated for selection, it can lodge that objection, IN WRITING, with the ABC and/or the local jurisdiction. If it's a reasonable challenge, accompanied by some kind of evidence, the objection would be considered and arbitrated. If it is judged not to be legitimate, it won't. The challenge must meet a rather rigid standard.

\* It would be understood by the sanctioning bodies that ANY official on their list may be eventually selected, and that once they have submitted this list of officials, the ABC and/or the local jurisdiction would have final word on the actual selection of officials, as well as any process of objection or complaint about those selections that may be lodged by either camp.

\* NO "ex-parte" meeting regarding the determination of the removal of an official that has already been named to officiate a bout can be held; that is, either both, or neither, of the fighters' camps would be represented.

\* Any judge that is licensed, working, and in good standing with an ABC member commission, and who that commission was willing to recommend in writing, would be considered, for all intents and purposes, to be registered with the ABC. Beyond that, the ABC could employ their own standards of evaluation. Whether it be the degree of recommendation from a member jurisdiction, review of performances by a committee specifically designated by the ABC, experience level, attendance at ABC-sponsored seminars, etc. - all these components would theoretically factor into the rationale behind the ABC's choices of the officials, from lists submitted by sanctioning bodies.

\* The ABC would establish a committee of knowledgeable boxing people to develop a familiarity with foreign officials (i.e., those who are not working within the United States).

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Foreign officials should be eligible to work championship fights within the U.S., on the simple premise that American officials are welcomed into other countries on a regular basis. This kind of courtesy needs to be reciprocated in some way. I would submit that the ABC monitor the qualifications of foreign officials and to maintain contact with the boxing commissions in other countries with regard to recommendations, credentials, etc., so that it could make educated and objective choices when foreign officials are among the pool that is submitted.

Jose Sulaiman, president of the WBC has indicated to me that he would be interested in exploring it, adding that he has not really had any problems with commissions outside of Indiana when it comes to the selection of ring officials. Marc Ratner, director of the Nevada Commission, tells me this is based on good common sense, and that this is not unlike the procedure he uses in his own selection process. Other members of sanctioning bodies, who didn't want to speak FOR those sanctioning bodies, think it's an extremely workable plan.

You know, just because you compromise doesn't need you have to put yourself in a compromising position.

Let's hope level heads prevail.

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