For the past four years, Russell Peltz has functioned, more or less out in the open, in a dual role - simultaneously serving as a boxing "coordinator" for ESPN2's "Friday Night Fights", and running a full operation as an independent promoter, staging shows and signing fighters to contracts, often with the implicit guarantee of ESPN exposure for those who will commit themselves to him.

Over the course of time, people have become "wise" to Peltz, and have called him out on more than one issue that has arisen out of this apparent conflict of interest. Some of these revelations have resulted in chapters to this series on boxing reform.

The general opinion in the boxing community is that Peltz has sought an alternate route to do supplemental business - in effect dealing himself in with promoters who are granted shows on the network, sometimes through his recommendation - either by partnering on the promotion itself, with a "silent" interest in a main event fighter, or both.

Those suspicions may indeed be substantiated by an upstart promoter who felt it incumbent upon herself to stand up to Peltz' power play.

Diane Fischer knows she's behind the eight-ball to begin with, as a woman in a man's game. But this Atlantic City operator gets an "A" for effort, and she simply didn't want to take no for an answer when seeking to produce a show that would air on ESPN2's Friday fight series.

Fischer had been dogging Bob Yalen of ESPN about televising an all-women's boxing card, and after considerable effort on her part the network relented. On July 31, 1998 in Atlantic City, Kathy Collins beat Olivia Gerula Peveira in the ten-round main event of what was, by all accounts, a sensational show with a sell-out crowd. After the fight, Fischer inquired with Peltz, ESPN's newly-named "coordinator", as to when she might be able to promote another women's show on the network.

"He told me there would be no more dates," Fischer says. "He said, 'We're going only with men's fights'."

That didn't necessarily dull Fischer's persistence, but she had become frustrated as a result of her subsequent attempts to deal with ESPN. Peltz seemed resigned not to give her any more TV dates, regardless of whether it was for women's OR men's fights, and numerous calls to Yalen, ESPN's "Director of Brand Management", who heads up the boxing package for the network, led nowhere.

"Peltz told me 'As long as I'm involved with ESPN, she'll never get a date'," says Rick Glaser, who has had a well-chronicled spat with Peltz regarding lightweight Billy Irwin - another freeze-out situation which resulted in Peltz ultimately stealing the fighter from

Glazer's control.

Fischer once again approached Peltz about promoting an ESPN show in March of 2000 at the Sands Hotel/Casino in Atlantic City. One of the featured bouts she proposed would have pitted her fighter, Will Taylor, a light heavyweight with a 15-3 record, against Peltz' fighter, Sammy Ahmad, who was 14-0-2. "Russell told me the fight wasn't strong enough," says Fischer.

Interestingly, in December of that year, the matchup suddenly became viable, when Peltz indeed used that very same ten-round fight on one of the Blue Horizon shows HE promoted on ESPN2. Fischer, who because of the television freeze-out was finding it difficult to get worthwhile action for Taylor, took the fight for a small purse, in her words, "to get the exposure" (Taylor won a decision, and went on to fight Reggie Johnson for the USBA light heavyweight title).

Then, last summer, Peltz called her, with a very curious proposition, and one that was rather surprising for Fischer. He told her she could promote fights on ESPN, with one condition. "He wanted to know if I was interested in going 50% partners with him in the promotions," Fischer says. Peltz also wanted a 50% share of Fischer's fighters; although she only had Will Taylor under contract, Peltz was seeking a half-share in the promotional rights of anyone Fischer would sign in the future, as a result of her TV deal.

It is not known whether Peltz' employers at ESPN knew that he was making this kind of overture to a promoter. Our inquiries as to whether ESPN management was aware of Peltz' activity, and if so, whether it sanctioned and approved such activity, have gone unanswered, despite repeated attempts.

It deserves mention that Fischer is an industrious operator with an impeccable reputation. She has been licensed in Pennsylvania and Louisiana, and was granted a promoter's license in New Jersey when it was a very difficult thing to acquire.

Peltz had requested a sit-down with Fischer to go over the finer points of the business proposal he was making to her. But principle, and her better judgment, took over.

She never engaged him in the follow-up meeting.

"That would have been like getting in bed with the enemy," explained Fischer. "I don't need that right now. It would be going completely against my beliefs."

Peltz made her pay, soon enough. Fischer had promoted three outstanding cards at Dover Downs in Delaware, a pari-mutuel establishment that had installed slot machines. Although she harbored plans to expand her relationship to something long-term, Fischer was effectively back-doored by Peltz, who went to Dover Downs management, and guaranteed them that Fischer could not produce television, but that HE could.

Peltz promoted a May 10 card at the facility, which featured Kassim Ouma in the now-famous

"tattoo incident" (which is dealt with in Chapter 18 of this series). He grossed a reported $105,000 for his efforts, not including that which he pocketed as an ESPN "coordinator".

Dover Downs indicated to Fischer that it would be happy to field additional proposals from her, but of course, they put her "in the trick bag", so to speak. They told her their next available date was October 4, but that they had to have TV coverage. For Fischer, part of the explanation she got was unusual indeed.

"All three shows I had done with them were on a Saturday," she says. "Now they want to do a show on a Friday. I knew what was happening."

What happened is that the race track had, in fact, already made a deal with Peltz, yet it was giving itself a certain plausible deniability, creating the facade that it was conducting a fair and open bidding process. And probably for good reason - it was no secret that Fischer, along with other promoters in the Mid-Atlantic region, had spoken to attorneys about initiating an anti-trust suit against Peltz and ESPN. In fact, Peltz' pitch to go partners with Fischer came after talk of the prospective lawsuit began to circulate publicly.

Fischer has been led to believe that the bidding for the October 4 show is still active, despite the fact that it has been reported in several newspapers, including Tuesday's

Philadelphia Daily News

, that Peltz is scheduled to promote the show at Dover Downs on that date.

Peltz is a life-long resident of Philadelphia, and is licensed by the state of Pennsylvania, within the jurisdiction of former ABC president Greg Sirb, who is currently executive director of the Pennsylvania commission. Thus far Sirb has not initiated an investigation into any of Peltz' activities regarding fighters or promoters that might constitute a conflict of interest.

But there's at least one disgruntled former associate who thinks there should be an investigation, and a thorough one.

"If this guy (Peltz) were Italian, they'd probably have led him out in handcuffs already," says Glaser.

(NOTE: Russell Peltz has refused to make comment to TotalAction.com with regard to his activities with ESPN)

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