

THAT'S A LOT OF PENS AND PENCILS

Written by Charles Jay
Thursday, 01 August 2002 18:00

For those poor souls who simply can't do without their daily dose of dirt, I've got a story that might just hit the spot.

In 1995, I was involved in the management of Robert "Preacher Man" Daniels, the former WBA cruiserweight champion, who at the time had climbed up into the top five in both the WBC and WBA. In the WBO we were #2 or #3 in the ratings (honestly, I forgot which), although we never really seriously considered fighting for that title.

One day my partner, Mike Frost, called me to relate an interesting piece of news. He had been contacted - repeatedly - by a gentleman from Miami named Ricardo Rizzo, who Frost says identified himself as "someone who could help Robert Daniels get a title shot". Rizzo must have spoken very enthusiastically in his pitch; he had my partner halfway convinced he could move mountains for our fighter. But still, Mike wasn't altogether sure what this guy's role was, and frankly, neither did I. In fact, the impression I came away with when Frost told me about him was that maybe this guy wanted to promote some shows.

We already had a promotional relationship with someone at the time, but I figured it didn't cost anything to listen, so when my partner asked me if I wanted to sit down and find out what this fellow had on his mind, we arranged for a meeting at the Tropical Park Gym in Miami, which was where Daniels was training.

To say the least, Rizzo was not what one would call a polished salesman. You could tell he was a little unsure about making his presentation, because he started beating around the bush, to the point where I was actually getting bored. And to be perfectly honest, after sitting there for what seemed to be at least five minutes, I still didn't know what he was trying to say.

Then, he basically came out with it - he told us that Daniels, ranked where he was, was not going to get a shot at the WBO cruiserweight title. But, if he were the number one contender, he would be in line for a mandatory opportunity. And he (Rizzo) was the guy who could make that mandatory shot happen - quickly. He explained that the WBO convention was upcoming, and though we didn't have to actually GO to this convention, all we had to do was come up with a "donation" to the organization, and he could virtually guarantee it would make our man the top cruiserweight contender. Such a donation would be made out to the WBO, and he - Ricardo Rizzo - would carry it to the convention on our behalf. I thought that was awfully nice of him.

Then he gave us his card.

It turns out he was a WBO official.

So how much was the donation he was looking for?

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"Ten thousand dollars."

For a split second, I was in a little bit of shock, not because we had been solicited in this way, but because it was done in a small office, with several other people in the room, including Daniels, his trainer, the guy who was running the gym, and a couple of strangers who I didn't even know. I figured if this guy was trying to peddle something shady, the least he could do was create more of a "cloak-and-dagger" effect.

Well, I started to get up out of my seat to leave, but I thought about it again, and decided I wanted to hear the entire story. So I asked Rizzo, "What's this donation for?"

"Pens and pencils for our members at the convention."

Upon further inquiry, I was assured that I had heard him correctly - PENS AND PENCILS.

Well, as they say, you could have knocked me over with a feather.

And I'm sitting there thinking - this guy couldn't come up with anything more creative than THAT? I had to start laughing. My partner started laughing. Then the whole room started laughing.

But this guy was NOT laughing. He was now working us even harder, like a used car salesman watching a prospect slip away. And it was clear he didn't want to walk out of that office with "no" for an answer. Almost immediately, his request dropped from \$10,000 to \$5000, and he told us if we "donated" that much he'd see what he could do, while at the same time explaining that some of the other managers of cruiserweight contenders were giving that much, or more.

"Everybody does it this way," is what Frost remembers him saying.

Well, we turned him down, as politely as we possibly could, and thanked him for his time.

The funniest part of the whole thing was that this guy would assume we even had \$5000 to throw at him. I can't remember us being flush with cash at the time.

The scary part is that, had we indeed had that kind of money to toss around at the drop of a hat, I wonder if we would have seriously considered giving in to temptation, considering this is the way the game is played a good deal of the time.

In retrospect, I think not.

We rationalized it this way - even if we had given Rizzo the money, and gotten the title shot, I couldn't see the move being that profitable. After all, I had heard about some of the purses for WBO title fights, and I figured \$20,000 would be a lot of money for a fight like that. If we were getting 25% as the manager's share, that kind of purse would return \$5000 to us - a financial wash at best - and we'd no doubt have to go overseas, only to get robbed

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of a decision somewhere. And to be honest, the WBO championship was so unimportant to us, I don't think I even paid attention to who the champion was at the time.

As it was, on the ride home, we had a few more laughs - Frost and I mused about whether Mr. Rizzo would have given us a receipt for the "donation", and if so, what in the world it would possibly have said.

Then our thoughts turned to what might have happened had we gotten the same proposition we'd just heard, at the same price, for a shot at the WBC, WBA, or IBF title.

I would have done the math, for sure, but I just couldn't find a pen.

Or a pencil, for that matter.

(NOTE: I did keep Rizzo's business card as a memento of the occasion, and you can see it below. We "whited out" the phone numbers.)

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