

TRYING TO GET IT STRAIGHT ON WBA RULES

Written by Charles Jay
Monday, 19 August 2002 18:00

Some time between now and its annual convention in Washington, which takes place September 11-13 - perhaps sooner than later, the World Boxing Association is likely to render a final decision on the appeal Kirk Johnson has recently filed.

And it's quite possible that the appeal will be denied, on the basis of some language that would seem to be unusually ambiguous.

Johnson's issue, as you know, revolves around the lack of "neutrality" among officials for Johnson's WBA heavyweight title fight against John Ruiz on July 27.

Section 20 of the WBA's Championship Regulations may deal specifically with that issue; then again, it may not.

According to Rule 20.1, it would appear as if the Nevada state regulations, which allow the commission to name the officials without input from any other party, would take precedence:

"No provision contained in these regulations shall prevail over the legislation that rules in the territory of a member commission in case it is incompatible or contrary to its application. Without prejudice that a previous agreement with the commission where the fight will take place states otherwise."

However, in the next paragraph - Rule 20.2 - there is language that would appear to be somewhat contradictory:

"In order to make compliance of the foregoing article effective, all applications for sanction of a World Championship fight shall be accompanied by a signed declaration by the promoter and the respective boxers, undertaking that the Regulations and Rules of World Championships of the Association will govern the fight."

Since there was no "signed declaration by the promoter and the respective boxers", there would be no effective compliance with local rules (according to 20.2), and therefore, confusion as to exactly what IS the proper protocol.

I'm no lawyer, but I have run this rule by several attorneys, and they really can't give me a definitive answer as to what it means.

I think I know what it's SUPPOSED to mean - that should there be a signed declaration stating WBA rules are in effect when there is NOT a conflict between the WBA and the local jurisdiction. But this is still not made crystal clear.

To compound matters, according to Gilberto J. Mendoza, Executive Director of the WBA, the

TRYING TO GET IT STRAIGHT ON WBA RULES

Written by Charles Jay
Monday, 19 August 2002 18:00

custom is for his organization to have an agreement with the local jurisdictions on officials, wherein the commission would name the referee and one judge, and the sanctioning body will name the other two judges.

Nevada functions differently than other commissions regarding this practice; sometimes they bend a little, sometimes they don't. But it has been up to its discretion.

"We faxed the proposed officials for Ruiz-Johnson bout to Nevada Athletic Commission on three different dates - June 21, 2002 (twice), on July 3rd and July 4th, listing our judges available," says Mendoza. "On July 9, we received a fax from Nevada Athletic Commission acknowledging the receipt of our previous communications indicating that they were considering the selection of Stanley Christodoulou for the heavyweight bout."

Of course, Christodoulou was not available for the Ruiz-Johnson fight, since he was already officiating at a WBA minimumweight title fight between Noel Arambulet and Keitaro Hoshino in Japan. And no other foreign official was substituted for Christodoulou, nor considered later.

Over the last couple of years the WBA has not gotten everything it has wanted out of Nevada.

In 2000, there were eleven championship fights held in Nevada under the WBA banner. Out of 22 WBA judges who would have theoretically been inserted as per the "gentleman's agreement" that may have existed, only eleven ultimately were.

In 2001, there were ten WBA title fights in Nevada. And the WBA only got seven out of a possible 20 judges.

And so, while I'm sitting here wondering whether the WBA will, in the end, use the customary non-enforcement of its rules as a defense in the Johnson case, I'm also saying to myself that, if they are, then (a) why there is a "neutrality" rule at all?, and (b) will this rule have a force and effect ANYWHERE in the world? And if it is intended to apply, should it not be rewritten, so that all parties can be completely clear on what is going to govern a title fight?

I would think it's better to take all the possible objections out of play BEFORE the fact. Am I right?

fightpage@totalaction.com

Copyright 2002 Total Action Inc.