Somehow, I managed to get my grubby little hands on an e-mail transmission today, which reads like this:

"Vice President Jack Kerns is performing a survey on behalf of the ABC to obtain information regarding the annual conference which was held at the Miccosukee Resort and Gaming. Of the thirty-two of commissions attending the meeting only 15 have returned the survey thus far.....Thanks for taking the time to fillout the survey, it will assist in setting the agenda for the next meeting."

The letter is signed - "Tim Lueckenhoff, President - Association of Boxing Commissions".

Tremendous news, to say the least - Jack Kerns will be assisting in setting the agenda for the next meeting.

It's just so laughable.

If you're like me, you have been wondering why in the world an organization like the Association of Boxing Commissions, which would aspire to respectability, would allow for Kentucky commission chairman Jack Kerns to stay on as a First Vice-President and member of the Executive Board.

The answer may lie in incidents that have taken place within the jurisdictions of some of the other members of the board.

In the last few years, there have been ring tragedies of one kind or another associated with at least five of the eight members of the ABC's Board of Directors. Of course, some of them have been unforeseen - including that of Pedro Alcazar, who collapsed and died, apparently without explanation, two days after fighting for the WBO super-flyweight title in Las Vegas (Marc Ratner's jurisdiction).

Others are borderline in nature - for example, in Oklahoma, which is overseen by Steve Bayshore, the Secretary of the ABC, a junior middleweight named Dyirell Crayton had to undergo emergency brain surgery after being knocked out in a fight against Stephan Pryor on December 14, 2001. Proper medical personnel were on the scene at Tulsa's Creek Nation Bingo, but there is legitimate doubt as to whether the fight should have been approved.

Pryor, the son of former junior welterweight champion Aaron Pryor, did not have a big reputation as a puncher, and sported just a 5-1 record. But Crayton had lost nine of his last ten fights, and in a bout eight months earlier against undefeated Israel Escandon, he was knocked unconscious for over 30 seconds. In the interim, he had also been suspended from Texas after a four-round stoppage loss to former Olympian Dante Craig.

On January 23 of 2000, in Venice Beach, Fla. - within the territory of ABC Vice-President Chris Meffert, Emiliano Valdez, a junior welterweight out of the Dominican Republic by way of Pahokee, Fla., went into a coma after a tenth-round KO loss to Teddy Reid. On March 23 of this year, Valdez died. The fight was competitive, as it should have been - Reid has gone on to win NABF titles at 140 and 147 pounds, and Valdez had a 10-2-1 record going into that bout, with losses only to then-undefeated Kassim Ouma and Kofi Jantuah.

At the time, there were arguments as to whether referee Brian Garry should have stopped the fight earlier, especially as Valdez seemed dazed in the fifth round and had been staggered on other occasions afterward. And criticism also arose about Valdez' trainer, Nelson Lopez, who sensed his fighter was badly hurt, but did not throw in the towel.

"How could I stop the fight?", Lopez told reporters. "They would have said, `It's ridiculous, a trainer bringing a fighter and not letting him fight.' I don't want anyone to get hurt, but that's the sport we choose."

Subsequently, the Florida commission became aware of another of Lopez' fighters - an amateur named Elijah Fenwick, who had died just a week before the Valdez fight, from injuries that were suffered in a January 11 sparring session at Lopez' Pahokee gym. In an astonishing revelation, it surfaced that Fenwick had a history of seizures, and that he had been hit in the head with a baseball bat before moving to Florida from Michigan. Lopez said he had no idea of Fenwick's history.

Colorado's Joe Mason, one of the ABC's regional directors, met with some misfortune in the very first fight card his commission had charge of.

This was the substance of a wire story published on April 19, 2001:

"PUEBLO, Colo. -- A boxer who collapsed from a brain injury after winning his first pro bout was in critical, unstable condition Thursday, a hospital spokeswoman said.

Cresencio Mercado, 19, won the featherweight match with a first-round knockout Saturday night and climbed on top of the ring ropes, waving his arms in celebration. But when he returned to his corner, his legs started shaking and he fell to the canvas.

Mercado, a former state Golden Gloves champion, sustained a brain injury and was listed in critical, unstable condition at Parkview Medical Center, spokeswoman Tressa Panepinto said.

Originally from Zacatecas, Mexico, Mercado is the sixth of seven brothers and is well known in Pueblo. He attended Central High School last year."

Two days later, Mercado died of a brain hemorrhage.

Once again, we weren't dealing with a fighter who, on the surface, was not capable - Mercado was a good amateur, who had lost in the quarterfinals to Brian Viloria in the U.S.

Amateur Boxing Championships in 1999.

It's not that we find any particular fault with these commissions. But it would offer a sufficient explanation if there were, say, a certain level of sensitivity to the kind of non-enforcement of safety laws that has put Kerns squarely in the hot seat.

Lueckenhoff, the ABC president, may have a higher level of sensitivity than anyone.

In Missouri, where Lueckenhoff serves as director of the commission, two fighters have met with tragedy in the ring - one of them died, the other suffered extensive brain damage.

The fatality involved Randie Carver, a world-class light heavyweight who died as a result of injuries sustained in a foul-filled September 1999 bout in Kansas City against Kabary Salem. Subsequent to that fight, questions were raised - originally by Salem's manager, Scott Massoud, and later seconded by others - about the role played by Ross Strada, the referee.

Massoud claimed that a close personal relationship between Strada and Carver prompted the referee to let the fight go much longer than it should have.

"If he had stopped the fight and Randie lost, due to the stoppage, he would have been blamed for his loss," Massoud told the Associated Press. "And that's something the referee didn't want. I'm not bad-mouthing (Strada), but we could've been out of there a lot sooner."

A lawsuit later filed by Carver's family names Strada as a defendant. And despite working on behalf of a state regulatory agency, Strada was in no way protected by state law when it came to liability - a fact he wasn't made aware of at the time.The state of Missouri has not stepped forward to offer him any protection whatsoever. Obviously, that's not a good message to send when your state's administrator is head of the national trade organization. But such is the way of boxing regulation. And it's not too unusual. Officials usually have to go to an outside agency, such as the National Association of Sports Officials, to get any insurance coverage at all.

The other Missouri situation brings its own degree of intrigue, for different reasons.

Fernando Ibarra Maldonado, a bantamweight, was knocked out in the sixth round of a fight on January 29, 1999 (just 7-1/2 months before Carver) against Thailand's Ratanachai Sor Vorapin, in a fight which took place at the Regal Riverfront Hotel in downtown St. Louis. Maldonado was able to get up and out of the ring but was unaccompanied by any medical personnel on the way to his dressing room. No doctor came back to examine him, as might be considered routine, in order to determine the extent of injury. A few minutes later, he collapsed, and it took a full THIRTY-FOUR minutes to get him to the hospital, simply because there was no ambulance on the premises.

Maldonado suffered a torn vein in his brain, which caused swelling and permanent brain damage. He fell into a coma, and though he thankfully survived, he had to spend two months

in the hospital before being released. He later sued Gateway Holdings, owner of the Regal Riverfront Hotel, because it had a contract with the promoter requiring that an ambulance be present, and apparently the hotel did not make sure that the clause was enforced.

It was the contention of Maldonado's attorneys that had an ambulance been available, intra-cranial pressure would have been relieved and brain damage may have been prevented.

The week-long trial resulted in a $41.1 million judgment for Maldonado, the largest in Missouri for the year up to that time (until the same firm won a bigger judgment against Bridgestone). However, since the judge failed to adequately instruct the jurors on the matter of punitive damages, it was taken away, and the plaintiff (Maldonado) held onto $13.7 in compensatory damages, a figure that is now on appeal.

Why wasn't the Missouri "Office of Athletics" sued as well? Good question. The answer is that Missouri did not require that an ambulance be present for safety purposes at a professional fight, so therefore they weren't violating state law in the course of their own supervision.

"From the day I started working on this case, I thought that was outrageous," said John Simon, who served as lead attorney for Maldonado. "I was shocked to hear that the ambulance wasn't a requirement."

That's correct - the commission headed by Tim Lueckenhoff, who now also heads the ABC, didn't feel it important enough to mandate an ambulance, for reasons that, in part, can be interpreted from Lueckenhoff's testimony at the trial, which he entered on behalf of the defense.

"He (Lueckenhoff) testified in court that it was a matter of money; that there were local, small promoters who couldn't afford to pay a few hundred bucks for an ambulance on site," said Simon.

Fortunately for Lueckenhoff, there were Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT's) on the scene, so there was no violation of the Professional Boxer Safety Act on the part of his commission.

But it's a poor example nonetheless.

Does Missouri require an ambulance NOW? Sure it does.

What's sad is that it seemed to take an incident like this to persuade Missouri to change its rules to promote safety. Of course, that's not much different than the way it unfolded in Kentucky, is it?

It had been reported that Maldonado's manager had been suspended in Mexico after another of his fighters died in the ring - that fact may or may not be material to the discussion. Mexican suspensions are generally not recognized by commissions in the United States.

What IS important is that the wisdom of approving this match in the first place must be questioned. Maldonado, who fought under the name Francisco Ibarra, came into the fight with a record of 5-3-3 with no knockouts, and only 47 rounds of professional experience. The furthest he had gone in a fight was six rounds. He had also been matched questionably just a couple of months earlier, against contender Will Grigsby, in a fight that ended in a one-round technical draw.

By contrast, his opponent, Sor Vorapin, sported a 35-3 record, with 303 professional rounds under his belt. He fought Mark Johnson for the IBF 115-pound title in his very next fight and subsequently challenged Tim Austin for the IBF bantamweight crown.

Clearly two completely different classes of fighter in the ring.

Clearly a lack of proper safety provisions present at the site of a professional show, regardless of the prevailing law.

Clearly a tragic result.

Clearly something that could have been avoided.

Clearly an awful example being set.

Clearly an item for the "agenda" when the ABC meets again.

Go ahead and put THAT in your survey.

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