

WHO IS THE

Written by Charles Jay
Tuesday, 24 September 2002 18:00

The great irony about the so-called "boxing reform" measures that are being proposed by people who don't seem to know any better is that the apparatus that is in place, and which would be perpetuated by these measures, is the very system, manned by the same people, which has actually necessitated the need for legislation to regulate boxing on a national level in the first place. Yet we continue on this silly cycle.

State commissioners - and there are notable, yet few, exceptions - don't have a clue as to how to reform boxing. Their general posture - and I have witnessed this personally - has been to concern themselves with LESS, rather than MORE, unless it becomes something in which it's entirely inappropriate for them to be involved. In those cases, they seem to be ready to jump in with both feet.

Come to think of it, I'd be hard-pressed to advocate any boxing legislation that doesn't fundamentally change the bad actors in this play.

And how many times do we need to be told that the various attorneys general won't enforce the Ali Act?

The people who have been empowered with such authority hardly even RECOGNIZE instances where the Ali Act, and/or the best interests of boxing, have been violated. Then again, think about it - asking state law enforcement officials to go out of their way to prosecute federal offenses would appear to be just a bit impractical, wouldn't it?

There's another way that seems to work much better.

One of the interesting - and I might add - unexpected, things I've discovered is that when you actually WRITE things about people, you tend to get the most reaction out of them. Voila!

Through the publication of "Operation Cleanup", we have managed to exert a certain degree of influence on the boxing industry. Almost any chapter that appears has something in it that prompts discussion, and sometimes action is even taken as a result. Of course, more often than not, it's because people have been shamed into doing so. There have been a LOT of people who have expressed gratitude that someone is stepping forward to say some of the things that need to be said. At the very least, we have created a certain degree of awareness, which has had more than its share of residual effect - I might have a hard time believing it unless plenty of others had told me as much.

Perhaps this is best summed up by a quote I received from Guy Jutras, a veteran boxing man who is head of the WBA Officials Committee -

"There is no doubt that you are forcing all members of the sector to be more accountable

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for their behavior. Which is a very good thing."

Indeed. I was recently asked by an interviewer how I would define "boxing reform". My response is that I imagine it wouldn't be so much different than reforming any industry - it involves effectively identifying problem areas, having the imagination to construct plausible solutions, while being fair and equitable in your assessment, and creating an atmosphere by which malfeasance cannot thrive without bringing serious repercussions - the end result being that, over the course of time, you have the effect of changing the behavior of those who will be subject to the reforms that are put in place.

So while violations of the Ali Act have, and likely will continue, to go unpunished, bad people who do bad things have become a little more conscious of being exposed right here, and if they're not, they should be. No, we can't prosecute anyone. But there are effects nonetheless, whether they be short or long-term - embarrassment throughout the industry, increased awareness on the part of the press, possible civil litigation, increased activism by parties who feel they have been "wronged" in the course of doing business, possible civil litigation, regulatory changes on the part of those agencies who DON'T have their head up their ass, and in the most extreme cases, even criminal consequences. It creates - here's that word again - ACCOUNTABILITY.

As such, "Operation Cleanup" has probably had more of a "reforming" effect on boxing than any of the legislation we've seen.

Let's see -- since September of last year, when our Kentucky series, which I look upon as a prequel to "Operation Cleanup", was first published:

-- We have managed to expose and reveal mechanisms at work in this industry that were heretofore completely unknown to regulators and legislators (not that they've done much with the info), not to mention the public;

-- The ABC has had to take a much longer look at how it needs to deal with overseeing fights held in non-commission states;

-- Dirty commissioners, and their neglect, have been exposed in the state of Kentucky, something that will ultimately change the way safety issues are addressed everywhere in the country;

-- We've scuttled fights that promoters should probably have thought twice about before putting together;

-- We've brought important issues to the table regarding officials, including the unwarranted interference on the part of the sanctioning bodies, and on the other side of the coin, the concerns about neutrality of officiating in title fights;

-- Some commissions will now start to tax and regulate ALL promoters who receive money from the networks for a fight, not just the "lead" promoter;

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-- There is, from what we understand, an imminent "shakeup" going on at ESPN;

-- Information from our stories will be instrumental in at least three civil suits that will have a direct effect on the way boxing is conducted in the future;

-- The "geniuses" in Washington have been forced to change the language of their legislation (more on this later).

And there's much more.

Most importantly, we've presented a side to the issues that has been suppressed - not by accident, I'm presuming - from the general public.

Having found out, early on, that people inside the so-called "system" were not interested in affecting any useful, realistic change, I have found that within this atmosphere, more could be accomplished for boxing by working OUTSIDE that system - a pleasant surprise, to say the least.

The mediocre efforts of John McCain and his friends have been irrelevant by comparison. So what do I need THEM for?

There's nothing in the world worse than "pseudo-reformers". That's because they deflect attention away from what the real problems - and the real solutions - are. Forget about going "against the grain" - their chief interest is in saying and doing only what is politically expedient. The effect, of course, is COUNTER-productive to real progress. And God forbid that anyone who would seek to have standards imposed on others would have those same standards applied to THEMSELVES.

I think it's safe to say that almost everyone involved, directly or peripherally, in this government "reform movement" would fit that description.

The way I see it, if I'm going to present a package on boxing reform, it's my duty to tell you:

- That Jack Kerns, the Kentucky commissioner who came within a pubic hair of being charged with negligent homicide in the Greg Page case, is a high-ranking member of the board of directors of the Association of Boxing Commissions (ABC);

- That other members of that ABC board have put the safety of fighters in imminent danger by not insisting on having ambulances at fight cards, by approving dangerous mismatches, and by allowing, in direct conflict with their own state law, underage fighters to get into a professional boxing ring.

- That there are television executives who have not hesitated to leverage their position in order to carve out a handsome personal profit for themselves, enabled in large part by the networks they work for, and that the "reformers" have very consciously looked the other way, for reasons that are dubious at best;

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- That promoters have often grabbed more than 100% of the purse of their own fighter by way of a "side deal";

- That while state commissions profess to advocate fairness and equity, they actually campaign AGAINST neutrality and uniformity with regard to championship rules because it doesn't afford them the absolute power and control they need to return political "favors";

- That the best law is one that protects EVERYBODY, and not one that specifically pits one segment of the boxing industry against another.

Yet McCain, a civil servant, doesn't feel it's HIS civic duty to tell you any of that, or to act on it.

Draw your own conclusions as to why.

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