

JOSE, CAN YOU SEE.....THE POINT?

Written by Charles Jay
Monday, 07 October 2002 18:00

This press release came to me from WBC President Jose Sulaiman, dated August 5, 2002:

"The practice of active litigation is not customary nor a part of the idiosyncrasy of the society where I was born and live, Mexico, and I have never personally in my life presented a lawsuit against anybody, for any reason whatever.

"However, my life has been impacted dramatically since I was injured during the physical confrontation between boxing heavyweight world champion Lennox Lewis and Mike Tyson last January in New York, where I was abandoned by all participating parties on the stage of the theatre, waiting for an ambulance that never arrived: with no concern or precaution to medically or spiritually help the person who was the President of the WBC, the organization that was an important factor for their championship bout to take place, and thus, I have felt a blast of disrespect against my pride and dignity as a human being.

"More than six months have passed, and I have been examined by several prestigious medical specialists, clinics and hospitals in Mexico City, California, Florida and New York, as well as having undergone numerous therapy treatments in an unsuccessful effort to find a remedy for my numerous traumas, some which are permanent and disabling and which, as of today, have limited me to stay at home, from where I have to do my work.

"All of the above reasons, plus my inability to understand or rationalize why institutions of so much experience and financial power, and teams of the two most highly recognized professional boxers, could plan and handle a press ceremony so poorly with no security, nor any control of credentials, for an event that even a child could foresee would be widely attended.

"Nor have I been able to understand the reason to have two boxers, who had shown so much bad blood for each other and who are two powers for nature, left alone for a face off all by themselves on a theatre stage without any security between them. Not only to avoid their hurting each other, but also to protect innocent bystanders from being hurt. Which happened to be my case.

"I perceive that with my lawsuit, I will be confronting a group of gigantic and powerful people and institutions, but I know that justice has no immunity. If I don't do it, I would be betraying my principles and my struggle for what is right, as well as my pride and dignity as a man, as a

WBC public figure and as a human being.

"I have put my case in the hands of the law firm Sullivan, Papain, McGrath, Block and Cannavo, who will in the future answer questions through my attorney Christopher McGrath, and following their advice, I will not in the future make any more comments.

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"To conclude, I am so firmly and strongly convinced of my rights that we will go through any and all legal instances, whatever the cost."

Now wait just a doggone minute here.

When the dispute over officials between the World Boxing Council and the Indiana Boxing Commission was taking place in connection with the Vernon Forrest-Shane Mosley fight, we were informed that Forrest's camp objected - rather strongly - to the presence of Fred Jones as one of the fight's judges because he was registered to the International Boxing Federation.

And why was that a problem? Well, partly because the IBF had previously stripped Forrest of its welterweight championship, and it was determined that an "IBF official" might prejudice Forrest for that reason - even though it could be argued that the stripping of Forrest at the time was justifiable, since, in the organization's estimation, he did not comply with the official rules that were set forth regarding obligations on the part of champions toward mandatory challengers (as a result, Michele Piccirillo recently won the 147-pound belt over Cory Spinks).

In a one-on-one conversation with Sulaiman, who is the president of the World Boxing Council, his explanation was that the decision to replace Jones was much more out of protest by Forrest's people than it was of his own doing.

Fair enough; it's true that the protests that came from Al Haymon, the representative of Forrest, were strong, and that they carried a lot of weight with the Indiana commissioners who were in attendance at their July 15 meeting.

Certainly, though, the WBC did nothing to mitigate the effect of such protests; in fact, they acquiesced to them, and in a sense, may have reaffirmed those objections. In a letter sent by Sulaiman to William Kelsey, chairman of the Indiana commission, on June 27, Sulaiman pointed out that,

"In regards to the title defense in Indiana from Vernon Forrest versus Shane Mosley, Forrest, the champion, has strongly and specifically stated that he would not accept IBF registered officials, as the IBF stripped him of his world title."

That objection seemed to be good enough for Sulaiman, and let's say, for the sake of argument, that it was.

Then you tell ME - how much of a legitimate objection does Lennox Lewis have now, in ANY fight in which he would defend his WBC version of the title, with the appointment of any official that is registered with the WBC?

I mean, if Forrest can squawk about a judge who has, in the past, worked for an organization that has stripped him of a title - for cause - shouldn't WBC officials now be disqualified from participating in any future Lennox Lewis title defenses, on the basis that

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the dispute between Lewis and the president of the organization that would seek to govern his title bouts is characterized by much more direct acrimony - to the tune of what is no doubt the lion's share of 56 million dollars?

It would appear to me that the only fair thing in this situation would be for WBC officials - that includes judges and referees - to recuse themselves from the process of officiating at any of Lewis' fights, or Tyson's, for that matter, until the litigation initiated by Sulaiman comes to a definitive resolution.

Because at this point, if I were part of the management team of Lennox Lewis, I would be worried that anyone from the WBC might prejudice me, simply because right now we'd be in an adversarial position.

I'm just using the same kind of simple logic that has been presented to me before, in the Forrest-Mosley case.

Oh, there's no doubt in my mind that Sulaiman suffered some injuries as a result of the press conference melee in January - there are plenty of witnesses who can attest to that. Whether Lewis had any direct connections to those injuries is a matter that will be addressed during the discovery process.

But is this lawsuit, in part, really about something else?

Surely, Sulaiman had to be anticipating the judgment awarded Graciano Rocchigiani, who stands to collect a lot of money (how much money will vary, depending on the results of an appeal) as a result of the decision in the damages phase of his lawsuit against the WBC. The original figure, with interest, was projected to be as high as \$31 million - enough in and of itself to send Sulaiman scurrying to find alternative streams of income (has he tried MLM marketing yet?).

And here's another thing that may have been a factor, at least until recently - we've been told that Lewis may have severely under-reported his purse for the June 8 fight with Mike Tyson.

The figure he registered was \$10 million, according to our information, when in reality the purse was guaranteed for \$17.5 million.

Since the WBC gets 3% of a fighter's purse in the form of a sanctioning fee up to \$10 million, with 1% for every dollar after \$10 million, the difference between the real figure and the reported figure made quite a bit of difference indeed as far as the fee the WBC was to be receive (\$75,000, in fact).

In all fairness to Sulaiman, he would not have been altogether wrong if he were upset about that. Eventually though, the matter was settled.

Of course, since we intend to be instructive around here, I'd like to point out that this is just

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another reason to reinforce the point I made in Chapter 42 - in the interests of disclosure, no fight should be allowed to take place without a signed contract that is on file with the jurisdiction which is sanctioning that fight. In speaking with someone from the Tennessee commission in connection with another story, I was informed that it is not within their rules or regulations to require that ALL bout contracts be filed. They certainly did not have all the contracts pertaining to the Lewis-Tyson bout registered.

That kind of policy - or absence of it, as it were - is simply wrong, and unwise.

And let me make another point - let's say the WBC, for example, had been required to be licensed, registered, or regulated - whichever word you want to choose - pursuant to a Federal or state law.

Sure, it's something they certainly don't want, or look forward to, but consider the flipside - they would at least have had some protection in this situation. In fact, they would have had a right to DEMAND protection from the commission, simply on the basis that they, as a licensed entity, are entitled to the same protections any other licensee would be entitled to when it came to GETTING PAID.

And who knows - the wheels of justice may have turned in a different direction.

Yep, another multi-pronged argument. But that's just me being me.

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