The 2nd Round

The notorious North American Boxing Federation, which was exposed for its corrupt ratings practices, blatant favoritism toward selected promoters, and violations of the Professional Boxer Safety Act and Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act in "Operation Cleanup", is at it again.

And once again, the NABF is being bankrolled in that pursuit by that bastion of respectability; the organization that is so vocal about the "dirty, filthy sanctioning bodies" and wants to clean up the sport - unless, of course, any of it applies to them - ESPN.

Tonight, in Temecula, Cal., ESPN is televising a co-main event feature which pits Radford Beasley against Art Simonyan for the vacant NABF title.

Or is it in fact for a title?

It seems now everybody is backpedaling.

Teddy Reid, who was originally scheduled to defend his NABF welterweight title - the same one he got as a by-product of the NABF's violations of the federal law back on June 28, had to pull out with an injury sustained in training. To fill that void, co-promoter Arthur Pelullo and NABF officials (presumably Sam Macias) quickly put together another NABF championship bout in its place - this one pitting Beasley against Simonyan.

Here are the exact words, as they appeared in a press release from Pelullo's Banner Promotions issued on Tuesday:

NEW CO-FEATURED FIGHT ON DECEMBER 13 - ARTYOM SIMONYAN VS RADFORD BEASLEY FOR VACANT NABF FEATHERWEIGHT TITLE IN TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA, TELEVISED ON ESPN2

North American Boxing Federation welterweight champion Teddy Reid was injured in training and has withdrawn from his title defense against Sam Garr.

In the new co-featured bout, Artyom Simonyan, 10-0-1, with 5 knockouts, of Glendale, Ca., will challenge for the vacant NABF featherweight title against former world title challenger Radford "The Man" Beasley, 22-1, with 14 knockouts, of St. Louis, Mo.

The only problem with all this is that neither Beasley nor Simonyan is even rated among the top fifteen featherweight contenders by the NABF. In fact, neither guy is rated in ANY division. And the ratings listed on the NABF's website (http://www.nabfnews.com) were last updated on November 23.

And there's the small matter of how the NABF could actually pull the rug arbitrarily out from under the champion. While it's true that Juan Manuel Marquez, who won the title in March, is scheduled to fight Manuel Medina for the IBF 126-pound crown on February 1, there has been absolutely no announcement that he has been stripped, nor any procedure that has been conducted by which to strip him. And it certainly is not the policy - at least the official policy - of the NABF to strip fighters once they agree to world championship bouts.

The list below is taken directly from the NABF website. They are the current rankings, which, according to the organization, were updated on November 23. As you can see, Marquez is still recognized as champion, and Beasley and Simonyan are conspicuously absent:

FEATHERWEIGHT (126#)

NABF CHAMPION: JUAN MANUEL MARQUEZ, MX, (W 3/09/02) WBC #3

WORLD CHAMPION: ERIK MORALES, MX

WBC AMERICAS CHAMPION: VACANT

CONTENDERS:

1. JUAN CARLOS RAMIREZ, MX

2. CESAR FIGUEROA, MX

3. ZAHIR RAHEEM, NJ

4. ROCKY JUAREZ, MX

5. WILLIAM ABELYAN, CA

6. GUTY ESPADAS, MX

7. BOBBY VELARDEZ, CA

8. JOHN MICHAEL JOHNSON, TX

9. LUIS FUENTE, MX

10. HECTOR VELAZQUEZ, MX

11. LEWIS WOOD, TX

12. MIKE ANCHONDO, CA

13. ENRIQUE SANCHEZ, MX

14. DAVID MURRILO, MX

15 MARTIN HONORIO, MX

16. STEVE LUEVANO, CA

Of course, the obvious question is, if Marquez was indeed stripped, why weren't any of the people listed in the NABF's top fifteen contacted with regard to the fight? Why were all of them bypassed in favor of these two?

Well, the answer is obvious enough, and fits into a very recognizable pattern - Beasley is signed with promoter Bobby Hitz, and Simonyan has recently inked a promotional agreement with Pelullo. That jumps them to the head of the pack, regardless of what the ratings say.

As a result, what we had here was yet another NABF title fight which has appeared literally out of thin air, constructed solely for the purposes of convenience - working to the advantage of the promoters, the sanctioning body, and the television network - basically in that order.

Beasley would seem qualified to compete for an NABF title. He is a former NABF champ, who challenged Joel Casamayor for the WBA's 130-pound title in September of 2000, suffering a fifth-round TKO defeat. After taking nearly two years off he has come back with two wins - over fighters with a combined record of 10-27-4.

Simonyan is a bit of a different case. He has never gone ten rounds, won a FOUR-round decision in his last fight, and has fought a roster of opponents with a combined mark of 47-75-12. Hardly enough credentials to justify him leapfrogging FIFTEEN rated contenders to earn a championship opportunity, when what he was originally scheduled for was his first-ever eight-round bout.

When asked whether ESPN acknowledged or endorsed the fact that such a manipulation of the NABF championship process had taken place, Bob Yalen, ESPN's head of boxing, said, "When the promoter came back with this as a replacement fight, I questioned him on the fact that neither fighter was rated by the NABF, and that I thought Juan Manuel Marquez was the champion. He stated that it had been indeed sanctioned as the vacant NABF title fight. If it is sanctioned by the NABF we have to acknowledge that fact, though we don't have to endorse it, as we were not privy to what was discussed between the promoter and the sanctioning body."

There is no doubt in our mind that what was discussed between the promoter (Pelullo) and the sanctioning body was a way to facilitate the NABF generating a sanctioning fee to replace that which was lost by Reid's pullout, with Pelullo's fighter (Simonyan) receiving the title shot. There is no reason to believe that Pelullo would have gone ahead and issued a press release announcing a title fight if he had not been given authorization from the NABF, because if he had, that would constitute false advertising, wouldn't it?

TOTAL ACTION became apprised of the NABF's latest game on Wednesday, and began to investigate it. Apparently that put a whole set of wheels in motion.

Now the NABF is trying to circulate a story that the information in that press release was a mistake, and that the Beasley-Simonyan fight is NOT for an NABF title, and never was. That simply doesn't pass the giggle test.

On the Banner promotions website, the fight, under "Upcoming Events", is listed like this:

"CO-FEATURE – 10 ROUNDS, FEATHERWEIGHTS"

Yet underneath that is exactly the same stuff that was in the press release:

"In the new co-featured bout, Artyom Simonyan, 10-0-1, with 5 knockouts, of Glendale, Ca., will challenge for the vacant NABF featherweight title against former world title challenger Radford “The Man” Beasley, 22-1, with 14 knockouts, of St. Louis, Mo."

Gee, when the NABF panicked, somebody forgot to change something.

Surely it was the NABF's intention to sanction the fight. Otherwise it would have notified Pelullo, and there would have been an announcement by now. Instead, as of 9 AM Eastern time on Thursday, when I had my contact with Yalen, he was operating on the assumption that the fight was indeed an NABF championship bout. According to a feature story about Simonyan, obviously PR-inspired, published on the Fight News website late Thursday morning, "Simonyan was scheduled to fight an eight rounder, however he jumped at the opportunity to fight in his first television bout. His 12 round vacant NABF featherweight title fight replaces the NABF welterweight title fight between Teddy Reid and Sam Garr when Reid suffered an injury during training."

I have yet to receive a press release from Banner Promotions, or anything in the way of an announcement by either the NABF or ESPN, with the intention of clearing up this confusion.

So now we'll have people paying $30, $50, and $70 for tickets at the Pechanga Resort & Casino who think they are going to see a "championship" fight, with legitimate contenders, who in fact will not.

Perhaps this is a matter for the California State Athletic Commission to explore.

And how does ESPN intend to handle it? Obviously they're in the middle of something pretty sleazy here. Yalen told us he'd be just as happy with a ten-round fight as he would with a 12-rounder, and that's fine. But the fact remains, this act of manipulation was performed, at least in part, by promoters Yalen has consciously chosen to do business with - Pelullo and Hitz. If Yalen, and ESPN, are really concerned about integrity in boxing, perhaps they might want to find out who was lying to them - Pelullo or the NABF, or both, and take action accordingly. My guess is they won't. Of course, it's an educated guess.

And how about those "journalists" manning the ESPN microphones? Yalen says, "All the announcers have free reign for every fight to question the method by which the fighters are rated or the method by which a fight gets sanctioned - there are no cuffs put on them at all."

Well then, in that case we should enjoy listening to Max Kellerman, who has passed himself off as sort of a "guardian of principles" in boxing (that is, when he's not conveniently looking the other way), as he brings into question the motives of the NABF, and the motives of his own employers as they willingly participate in this out-and-out charade. We'll find out tonight if he has that kind of integrity.

C'mon kid - spit all over that studio. I dare you.

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