

The 3rd Round

If you're familiar with what I do, you know I've rambled on and on questioning the feasibility of putting people with little or no knowledge of boxing in positions where they are actually regulating the sport.

Well, the New York State Athletic Commission has just appointed Ron-Scott Stevens as its "director of boxing". Assuming that the "director of boxing" for a boxing commission would be a post that carries some significance with it, I would say that, on the surface, this looks like an appointment that's going to thrust boxing in the state of New York in a much more positive direction.

And I say that for several reasons:

-- Stevens is very familiar with the sport and industry of boxing from a wide variety of perspectives. He has had to work within ultra-tight budgets in order to put together club shows; he has had the opportunity to take part in bigger shows - and virtually everything in between. So he's no stranger to the needs and concerns of the "grass roots" promoter or the major operator.

-- He's had exposure to the television aspects of this business.

-- In all probability, he recognizes the conflicts that can exist between the various roles people play in this industry, and should be in a position to appropriately address situations that may arise out of those conflicts.

-- He's been close enough to promotional organizations (most recently, Cedric Kushner Promotions) to know the nuts and bolts of putting on a show, so he won't get ridiculous when it comes to exercising his "authority".

-- In other words, he's essentially a boxing man.

Gee, that's refreshingly different.

Oh, and one other thing:

He's basically a **MATCHMAKER** by trade.

I put that word in capital letters because it's especially important right now. A sense of matchmaking, and the responsibility that follows, is critical to the duties of any commission, since it is so often abused, misused, and misinterpreted by regulators who are not the least bit equipped to handle it.

NEW YORK STEPS FORWARD - MAYBE

Written by Charles Jay

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This deficiency has been particularly glaring in New York, which has made a number of questionable decisions in recent years concerning the approval/disapproval of matches, in the process transforming a commission that was once the strongest and most efficient in boxing into an industry joke, at a time when those kinds of jokes are not very funny. Can anyone say "Richie Melito"?

If Stevens can bring some sanity to this process, he will have improved the performance of the New York commission immeasurably.

Enough to pull it out of its period of steep decline? I really don't know. That's because I don't know how freely the power brokers at the commission, which still includes more bureaucratic types than ever should be assembled in one edifice, allows him to do his job.

Look - there is no getting around the fact that a certain amount of political finesse is required to engage in any appointed position related to state government. A little subservience has been known to go a long way.

But there is indeed a difference between playing politics and being CONTROLLED by politics. And if the structure that is in place does not allow Stevens to perform his duties with what would, I figure, be an unusual degree of autonomy, it will be difficult for Stevens to perform his duties - period.

Certainly I'm hoping it works out with Stevens, because I'm thinking it can set a shining example for other state commissions across the country. You see, the mentality on the part of state government is that their priority is to appoint key personnel on the basis of political connections, favors, or other reward systems that really have nothing to do with qualifications for the task at hand. That has undoubtedly held true insofar as boxing is concerned.

Of course, we realize you're not going to find a former matchmaker in every jurisdiction. But if Stevens' tenure is successful, it may inspire those who supervise appointments of this nature to turn their focus more toward people who have at least a modicum of meaningful industry experience in their background.

The residual effect, almost irrefutably, would be to improve the quality of regulation across the board.

There are worse things that could happen.

Yes, Stevens has just left Kushner's employ, and I know there are going to be people who question what his level of impartiality will be. But where would you find a truly capable boxing person who HASN'T been associated - even closely - with a promotional organization or other partisan boxing interest at one time? Don't get me wrong; I'm sure Stevens will be subject to a certain degree of scrutiny. But unless he's still employed by Kushner while also performing his function for the commission, I would consider that to be a non-issue.

The REAL issue is this - we've now got a boxing guy in New York.

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