The 15th Round

Q: How does a little story all of a sudden become a big story?

For the answer, kindly read on.

When I originally published an installment in the first "Operation Cleanup" book about promoter Chris Webb writing a check to NABA junior middleweight champion Travis Simms that, to put it diplomatically, wasn't quite good, I really didn't expect it to be such a big deal. In fact, didn't intend to follow up on it to any great degree.

But some things kind of have a way of snowballing.

First, after having been called out on this bad check, Webb started in, accusing me of "poor reporting" and lying in direct e-mails to my office. And he demanded I respond and retract, or else "I will have no other choice but to contact an attorney".

Hey - everybody's choices are completely up to them.

But when you try that kind of shit with me, you had better be completely in the right, or you're liable to buy yourself a follow-up story. Or two. Or three.

So I started writing them.

Instead of sitting back and taking his medicine, however, Webb decided he would try to cover his tracks, then call me a liar again.

Why? Well, I recently learned that Webb got himself involved in a February 14 ESPN show in Louisville that features Laila Ali, and not in a small way either - Webb actually forwarded money to Johnny McClain of Absoloot Boxing in order to buy the rights to the live gate.

Of course, by engaging in that activity, he's violating the terms of his suspension by the Kentucky Athletic Commission. But I'm not so sure he's as worried about the commission as he is about fighters, and the people involved in the promotion, to the point where, in a subsequent, less inflammatory e-mail to me, he said, "I only hope that you will take the facts that I have supplied you with and consider correcting the situation because as of right now no one wants to deal with me". Indeed, McClain is making arrangements to get his own license in Kentucky, so he won't have to use Webb's.

And I'm still waiting for facts that would lead me to "correcting the situation".

But I don't lack for evidence that completely exacerbates it.

A few days ago, I get a call from someone named Henry Oglesby, who apparently is acting as sort of a matchmaker for Webb. His son, Byron, also happens to be the trainer for Travis Simms. I think you know where this is going.

Oglesby immediately began to sing the praises of Webb - "Chris Webb paid everyone with no problem at all."

"Chris Webb is one of the straightest guys I know."

"Chris Webb is just trying to do the right thing."

And, in so many words, where the hell did I get off saying those horrible, awful things about his associate?

Then, the explanation that was supposed to put the whole thing together for me: "The problem was that Simms went to the wrong bank to cash his check. He went to a bank that SOUNDED like the name of that bank (Fifth Third Bank), but it wasn't the same. Chris (Webb) had enough money in that account."

Well, I explained that I had talked to Travis Simms and his wife in the process of preparing the original piece. They seemed like intelligent people to me. And so I told Oglesby his own tale just didn't sound plausible. In fact, I could sense it was something that was hastily put together because there was no truthful story they could have told that would have worked.

I asked Oglesby three times if he was sure Simms had the story all wrong. He said he did, and added that he had documentation to back up everything he was saying. I told him he could feel free to have it sent, but cautioned him that the only thing I was interested in; the only thing that would hold any water with me, was a statement of account balance that showed Chris Webb had sufficient funds to pay Travis Simms ON THE DAY HE WROTE THE CHECK TO HIM.

That evidence, of course, has never made its way into my office.

Well, I certainly wanted to call Travis Simms and follow up. But he saved me the trouble; now more than five minutes after hanging up with Oglesby, my phone was ringing and Simms was on the other end of the line.

The first words out of his mouth were, "I'm calling on behalf of promoter Chris Webb.....". He went on to tell me that ultimately, he is happy with the way things turned out; he has his money, and that he, Travis Simms, was looking forward to the
opportunity to work with Chris Webb again (there you go, Travis - you're on the record).

Then he mentioned the word "retraction".

I stopped him right there. Here were the first words out of MY mouth: "Gee Travis, by any chance has Webb told you he was giving you a fight on the February 14 show?"

"Yes."

"So you're looking to back off your story because they're promising you a payday?"

"Well, you've got to understand, this is my career. This is my livelihood."

"I understand all that. But you say you want me to issue a retraction. It was YOUR complaint that started this whole thing. So really, we're not talking about MY retraction, we're talking about YOUR retraction, aren't we? Are you trying to say that what you told me, and what your wife told me, wasn't true? Did you lie to me?"

"No."

"Then I don't understand where a retraction would come into play."

Then I walked him through his original story. Was he sure that he went into the same bank as the one listed on Webb's check? Yes. When he asked the teller to cash the check, was he told there was no account at that bank, or that he was at the wrong bank? No. Was he instead told that there was no money in the account? Yes.

I relayed the story Henry Oglesby had told me. Without calling Oglesby a liar, Simms assured that his own original account, the one I relied on to publish Chapter 70 of "Operation Cleanup", was accurate.

I appreciated the honesty.

But the point is, while Simms didn't back off his story, he wanted ME to back off MINE. And if I started to do things like that, with no basis whatsoever, I might as well turn in my pen and paper right now.

This whole incident can teach everyone a lesson, because it shows why it can so difficult to move forward if you're trying to bring about changes. A lot of fighters get scared to speak up, and think twice after they've done so. And how do I know when a fighter is really sincere when he comes off as if he's standing up for all fighters in general but is ready to cast all that aside the second it looks like he's going to be able to take advantage of that same system, or when he is coerced, through some form of satisfaction, to reverse field?

While it's true Travis Simms did not back off his original story to me, quite frankly he was in a position where he had no other choice but to tell the truth. I'm thoroughly convinced he would have been perfectly happy if I had turned around and told my readers I had originally made a big mistake, or that I had misquoted him. I'm sure he wouldn't have minded at all if it was ME who turned around and lied in that manner. All because someone was going to offer him a fight. Or was he offered the fight on the condition that he could soften me up? I don't know. All I can tell you is that as of this writing, Simms has been taken out of consideration for a place on that February 14 show.

There's a lesson for the Chris Webbs of the world to absorb also. If you're caught with your pants down, sometimes it's best to just hope it all blows over. What you DON'T do, if you're in a position that is not absolutely defensible, is to CHASE it. Which is exactly what Webb did - first by threatening me with an attorney, then by being party to a cover-up, in which I was fed an embarrassingly hokey story, then following that with further e-mails designed to appeal to my sympathetic side, in which he wants me to feel bad because no one wants to deal with me. Well, SHOULD anybody want to deal with him?

And what happens as a direct result of all this? You're just feeding me with more ammunition - and more motivation - to make this a continuing story.

Of course, the ironic thing, as we have mentioned previously, is that as Webb is paying site fees, putting together undercard matches in conjunction with Oglesby, making the fight offer to Travis Simms, and prodding Simms to contact me for a "retraction", he is doing so while under suspension by the Kentucky Athletic Commission, supposedly until June 30.

I say "supposedly", because instead of issuing further disciplinary action against Webb for violating the terms of his suspension, Jack Kerns, the paragon of virtue who is the chairman of the Kentucky commission and front man for the Association of Boxing Commissions, is getting ready to take him OFF that suspension.

By all accounts it's for no other reason than that Webb will be instrumental in producing a fight card in the area, which would generate money for the commission, and for all I know, Kerns personally.

Proving once again - a whore is a whore is a whore.

I guess that's MY lesson to learn.

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