Joseph Agbeko has been all class throughout this debacle. Let us hope he is rewarded, and that moving forward, boxing powers do the right thing. Our collective breath will not be held. (Hogan)

Keith Kizer may be a decent clerk but he's a clerk all the same, a fact he most recently made clear this week when comparing a boxing referee to an umpire. This may come as news to Mr. Kizer but an umpire calls balls and strikes. A referee makes calls that can change a man's life. Or end it.

To say referee Russell Mora "is a very good referee who did a subpar job last Saturday'' when he allowed at least a dozen low blows to be struck by Abner Mares on his way to a sullied

majority decision over IBF bantamweight champion Joseph Agbeko is like saying “it was a little stormier than we expected’’ after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans.

That, frankly, is what Mares was allowed to do by Mora’s incompetence. He was allowed to devastate Agbeko with repeated shots not only to the groin but also to where the leg joins the body, an old trick that quickly takes away the legs of another man.

Although it took a few days, even Golden Boy Promotions president Richard Schaefer finally admitted his fighter had been given an unfair advantage and a rematch was warranted. Unfortunately, he didn’t leave it at that. He went on to do what they always do in boxing in this kind of situation, which is one of the many reasons the sport has fallen from its once predominate perch among general sports fans. He tried to justify a bad call by claiming not so long ago another Golden Boy fighter had also been victimized.

Let’s accept for a minute that the other guy had been a victim of a bad decision or incompetent refereeing. So what? How does that in any way excuse what went on under Mora’s watch or make it remotely acceptable?
Fortunately, once again boxing has a chance to do the right thing, something the men who run the sport often seem to find difficult to accomplish. The IBF has ordered an immediate rematch, as it should have.

Mares can either accept it or relinquish the title and thus make a mockery of SHOWTIME’s efforts to crown one bantamweight champion with its four-man tournament. Schaefer said he was already in discussions with Ken Hershman, who runs boxing for SHOWTIME, and they would see if something could be worked out.

“Could’’ should not be the operative word here. “Will’’ should be the operative word. The only word, frankly. Make the immediate rematch, put it on television and keep Russell Mora out of it.

Kizer, who spent time criticizing the media for harshly criticizing a man who could have gotten Fernando Montiel killed seven months ago when he allowed him to take more punishment from Nonito Donaire after he’d been knocked to the floor with his legs literally quivering and then allowed Mares to beat Agbeko below the belt rather than above it, also has an opportunity to match his deeds with his words.

The Nevada State Athletic Commission’s executive director said people saying Mora should not referee again should “look at themselves. Saying stuff like that is a lot worse than this…’’

Saying an incompetent referee who allowed a man to be hit below the belt more than a dozen times, called a resulting knockdown from one of those blows, and insisted that what appeared to be a slip was also a knockdown should not again officiate a high-profile match is worse than Mora costing Agbeko his title and more than a few chromosomes? If Keith Kizer believes that he’s more incompetent than the referee he appointed to officiate the match despite the protest of Dana Jamison, who runs much of the day-to-day operation for promoter Don King.

Eight days before the fight Jamison told Kizer she and King considered Mora “a Golden Boy

referee,'' meaning they felt he would unfairly favor Mares, who is promoted by Golden Boy, over Agbeko. Guess what? He did. Perhaps not consciously but he did.

Why Kizer didn't simply appoint a referee acceptable to both sides only he knows but to say it doesn't look good to be told one side believes a referee will play favorites, ignore it and then watch the guy do just that should make Kizer look at himself.

Time will tell if he does. Time will also tell if Russell Mora is, as Kizer suggested, going to have to go back to working preliminary bouts to earn another shot at a main event in Nevada. If that occurs over a lengthy period of time then fair enough. But if it's the usual boxing sleight of hand and he's soon back working the big fights again we'll know what really went down in Las Vegas last weekend.

The IBF has mandated a rematch within 120 days (Dec. 14) and said that neither fighter can take an interim fight. A deal is supposed to be consummated for the fight by Sept. 15 or a purse bid will be held. What is more important than a pursue bid is that the fight itself be held.

The best disinfectant, they say, is sunlight and what went on both Saturday night and in the days leading up to the fight could use it because, frankly, everything about the way Mora and Kizer handled this situation stunk from the refusal to come up with a mutually acceptable referee to the man's one sided performance to Kizer's comments after the debacle ended.

Now both Kizer and boxing have a chance to clean up their mess.

Just don't count on it happening.