

Regarding Thomas Hauser's Role With HBO, and TSS

Written by Michael Woods

Wednesday, 07 March 2012 10:23



photo by Howard Schatz

Any real boxing fan who has even a slight familiarity with modern-day boxing journalism knows that Thomas Hauser, the esteemed Ali chronicler and HBO gadfly, took a job with HBO, as a consultant.

On February 29, Hauser, who has written for TSS since December 20 10, and who I am friendly with, wrote me this email

:

As of this week, I've undertaken a new role. I've agreed to serve as a consultant to HBO Sports. I will have no decision-making authority at HBO. I'm not authorized to represent the network to third parties in business matters. I'll continue to write about boxing for various websites and print publications. To the extent that my by-line appears less frequently this year than it has in the past, it will be because I'm currently engaged in the time-consuming task of writing a novel about Charles Dickens. I'm grateful to the leadership at HBO Sports for giving me this opportunity.

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One of my first thoughts was: This is like Bob Woodward taking a job in the Nixon administration. The more I pondered, and I did ponder, and am still pondering, because I always question what I do, and my role, and my behavior, and my ethics and boundaries, and the ethics and boundaries found in fightwriting and journalism in general, I dismissed that analogy. Bob Woodward yes, Nixon administration, no. I don't think that's fair to the current administration at HBO, and maybe even the past one, led by Ross Greenburg, of whom Hauser was no fan.

I never gave more than a half second thought to telling Hauser that I'd rather he no longer contribute to TSS. Even when the pundits, and fellow members of the fraternity weighed in, many harshly, I didn't reconsider. Mainly because I acknowledge that everyone who does this for a living has conflicts. Everyone. And if they choose not to acknowledge that, then that's on them. Was part of me disappointed that Hauser will now not be in a position to publicly dissect the most powerful organization in the sport? Absolutely. That's a huge loss. The contacts he had in HBO, who could and would share with him details of the sausage-making enterprise, the passion and intensity and skill he exhibited in his critiques, his lobbying on behalf of fans who simply want to watch the best fight the best...Hauser's jump to HBO leaves a gaping void in our game which cannot be understated and will not be filled. Boxing got lucky when Hauser chose to apply his talents to our sport. His tenacity and skill as an investigative reporter are unmatched in the boxing realm, and I suspect could be applied to the same effect in any sphere.

But the man is allowed to follow his own path. And I'm certain that the same traits and desires which were evident in his annual critiques will be applied, just in a different way, and sadly, not for our consumption. Hauser, I think, will still lobby for what is best, what is right, but he will do so sitting across from the decision makers, instead of through the keyboard.

In an attempt to clarify what I think about this development, and also how Tom sees the arrangement, and his place in the fightwriter fraternity, and in the journalism world, I offer this question and answer back and forth I did with Tom.

Q) When you told me that you were taking a job at HBO, one of my first thoughts was: This is like Bob Woodward taking a job in the Nixon administration. Is that a poor analogy?

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A) As you said in a phone call, Nixon has left the White House. I've always had a great deal of respect for the many things that HBO does well and I've maintained friendships with a number of people at HBO Sports. I've been a "talking head" on several HBO Sports documentaries and written numerous articles for the HBO Sports website. I think my appointment speaks to HBO's commitment to give its subscribers the best programming possible and to remain a positive force in boxing in the years ahead. It's a signal to the boxing community that HBO Sports is willing to listen to constructive criticism and is open to new ideas.

Q) I tend to think that just about no one is free from conflicts of interest when they work most any journalistic beat, so I try to be quite judicious when I sling arrows in this arena. But some folks, some of whom themselves have to negotiate conflicts of interest from various masters they serve, were not shy about slinging arrows at you. And part of me gets that; many of us have looked to you over the years as the Seymour Hersh of the fightwriter set. Your reporting on the inner workings at HBO, for me, was something I looked forward to every holiday season like I do the Grinch cartoon. You held them to a high standard, and you set a high standard of behavior. Did you think long and hard about accepting this HBO gig, because you are seen as the ombudsman of the sport?

A) I'd much rather be part of a team and help the team get things right than criticize after the fact.

Q) Usually you write about the fighters and the suits and such. A bunch of columns have come out touching on your news. Any assertions, or contentions, or accusations that you want to address? Did all the writers get it right, or do you want to use this forum to offer a correction or clarification?

A) Some of the columns were responsibly written and raised concerns that were honestly felt. Others were wildly inaccurate and silly --

[John, Chapter 8, Verse 7]: "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone."

Q) If I may read between the lines. My perception is that you mainly took issue with how Ross Greenburg ran the show at HBO. I understand Ken Hershman hired you. He's had a good track record at Showtime, and so far so good, I guess, at HBO. But what if you perceive him to be going off the rails? Would you write about that, for TSS, or some other publication? How would you handle that?

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A) I certainly plan to write about fights that are on HBO and other networks and also about other matters of interest to the boxing community. Readers can make their own judgment regarding the credibility of what I write, knowing that I'm a consultant to HBO Sports. In the past, I wrote one or two lengthy investigative reports about HBO each year. I don't think that's consistent with my new role, and I won't do it. If other journalists feel that my becoming a consultant to HBO Sports has created a void, then they should fill it.

Q) Can you touch on your role with the BWAA, as one of the stories focused on that?

A) I resigned today (Tuesday) as chairman of the six-person BWAA membership committee. One of the other committee members will assume that role.

[Comment on this article](#)

Kid Blast says:

From Tim Smith is last week's NY Daily News:

HAUSER SIGNS ON AT HBO Author Thomas Hauser has signed as a consultant with HBO Sports. Exactly what he's going to consult with them on no one is exactly sure. Hauser was given the consultancy after years of writing scathing articles critical of the cable network's boxing programming. His criticism was so harsh that Ross Greenburg resigned as President of HBO Sports last December a few months before his contract expired. Many of the people Hauser ripped are still working at HBO Sports. Hauser's hiring came from the top levels of HBO where apparently the philosophy is if you can't shut 'em up, bring 'em in the house. Hauser said he will continue to write articles about boxing for the website TheSweetScience.com. Can't wait to see what he writes about HBO next. The HBO honchos hired Hauser to silence him and have given him some nebulous responsibilities that call for him to develop projects. Wish we all could get those kinds of six-figure development deals. This is a real head scratcher even for people who have followed boxing for a long time. It looks like an orchestrated campaign by Hauser to get a job with HBO. And by giving him a job, HBO is admitting that his criticism was correct and he's the only one who can fix it. Shame on both of them.

Kid Blast says:

I'm not sure why or how my post was repeated 4 times. Once is enough.

My question is this: Will Tom Hauser continue to write for TSS?

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Thanks,

Kid Blast

brownsugar says:

Way to put "HBO" ON BLAST. ...Kid.

Kid Blast says:

"...Mainly because I acknowledge that everyone who does this for a living has conflicts. Everyone. And if they choose not to acknowledge that, then that's on them..."

Really, I'd say that spurious logic was a foundation of sand dsigned to rationalize Hauser's actions. Guys like Magno, Iole, Golman, and others too numerous to list manage to avoid conflicts. I'd say the conflicts are pretty much limited to one group and I'll let you figure out what that Group is.

Kid Blast says:

Thanks brownsugar

dino da vinci says:

[QUOTE=Kid Blast;14549]I'm not sure why or how my post was rpeated 4 times. Once is enough.

My question is this: Will Tom Hauser continue to write for TSS?

Thanks,

Kid Blast[/QUOTE]

If there's a God.

Tom Hauser is special. So much so, that when TSS was formed, it did so with one core intent. Identify the best boxing writers and get them on board. A wish list was drawn up (By then Editor-In-Chief Charles Jay, also a highly gifted writer) and the calls went out. The two that we didn't land that were on that list were Michael Katz and Tom Hauser. Of course, that list has now been completed.

We've had fighters write. Boxing commissioners. Doctors. Analysts. And of course, some remarkable writers. Why not a consultant?

Is Hauser special? The only writer I used to trek away from TSS to read. The only one. Short list of best ever.

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So KB, the question becomes would TSS be better served without him? Actually, that's just a rhetorical question. We all already know the answer.

Kid Blast says:

I get your point(s), but I am happy to say I am not one of his sycophants. There are writers on TSS whom I really like. The pompous Hauser is NOT one of them.

Kid Blast says:

What gives here? I quoted from your article and made a point about it and the post is comment is not posted! Huh?

Kid Blast says:

Well, if there is going to be censorship here on civil posts, I reckon I'll just mosey on down the road. What I don't quite get is that if you put up an article, I should think it would be fair, albeit civil game. I guess quoting from your article is a no no. That's very sad . Adios amigos.

Radam G says:

Wow! A bit of reality distortion, make-believe actuality and serious manipulation are wanting to run wild up in here. That is old TSS Universe jive. Crying the big C is _____. I think that I need to peepee. Hehehehe! Holla!

Kid Blast says:

Huh?

Kid Blast says:

Hmm, I may have posted too soon. That mught have been the issue.My bad.

Radam G says:

Sometimes inattention blindness sneaks all up in your eyelights [sic]! Holla!

Kid Blast says:

"A) I resigned today (Tuesday) as chairman of the six-person BWAA membership committee. One of the other committee members will assume that role."

Very good news becuase it represented a terrible conflict in my humble opinion.