Lee Samuels (center) receives BWAA Good Guy Award in 2007, with cohort Ricardo Jimenez (right), and poses with ex heavyweight champ John Ruiz. (BWAA)

It's easy to lose oneself during the presidential election season. All too often, it seems to bring out the worst in us, and that's no matter which side of the aisle you prefer. Instead of cooler (and let's face it, more tolerant and even logical) heads prevailing, we often default to something as basely despicable as dehumanizing those with whom we don't readily see eye-to-eye.

Luckily for most us, we only have to deal with it every four years. While it seems everyone becomes a political pundit during the presidential election process, most of us go back to our preferred pastimes after it is all said and done, and thank goodness for it.

Not so with boxing, because boxing's political season is never over. Something big seems to happen every day, and it is quite easy to get riled up in the muck of it all. How many caricatures do we see daily of Bob Arum or Oscar De La Hoya? How about the latest Twitter scuff between Floyd Mayweather and 50 Cent?

In reality, though, people behind the scenes of *anything* we like to follow (boxing, politics, etc.)

are just that -- people. One of those people, Lee Samuels from Top Rank, was given a lifetime achievement award this week by the WBC and inducted into their Legends of Boxing Museum, along with his hardworking co-workers Ricardo Jimenez and Angie Jackson.

It's easy to denigrate decisions of faceless entities like the WBC and promotional outfits like Top Rank, but when we get too wrapped up in wearing our omniscient judging hats, we far too often miss opportunities to recognize some really good people along the way. Let's stop doing that.

Now, I'm no big shot in the boxing world. Heck, I'm not even a medium shot, but I've been fortunate enough to be around enough of those types (as well as my fellow little people) to know that Lee Samuels is by all accounts one of boxing's good guys. Samuels has been with Top Rank for what amounts to be around two decades now, and I assure you anyone in a business like boxing for that long without ending up portrayed as a cartoon figure must know something or other about the basic dignity of the human being.

"Lee Samuels is a friend of boxing," WBC Executive Director Mauricio Sulaiman told me. "He is always willing to resolve any matter at anytime, always with a smile and a will to make people happy. We have known Lee for many years, and he is a true gentleman and a great asset to the sport of boxing."

Hall-of-Famer broadcaster Al Bernstein concurs.

"I'll tell you what, in thirty-something years of being involved in the sport of boxing, there's a short list of people that I can probably say I've never had one moment, not a moment, of distress with," Bernstein said."Lee is one of those people, and in a way that's amazing, because someone who is doing PR for a company you have to deal with sometimes as a news reporter or a journalist, you would think that no matter how nice or how accommodating a person is, there might have been some moments that were difficult…I've never had *one* with him."

Bernstein called it a "privilege" to have worked closely in the same business with Samuels over the years. He said it wasn't just that Samuels was nice and accommodating, but that he was so while remaining exceptionally good at his job. So much so, he told me, that even Top Rank's competitors come away from co-promotions with good impressions of him.

“He’s simply a delightful man,” Bernstein said. “I’m one of those people who’ve won that Good Guy Award [from the BWAA, this year]…believe me, the man that deserves it the most, the poster boy for the Good Guy Award, is Lee Samuels, who also won it [in 2006].”

Samuels has been involved in some form or fashion with many of the biggest fights in the last quarter century. His first big fight assignment was the 1985 Ray Leonard versus Marvin Hagler bout, and he’s been a key cog in helping Top Rank promote some of the biggest names in the sport ever since, including big money superstars like Oscar De La Hoya, Manny Pacquiao and Floyd Mayweather.

Before working for Bob Arum, Samuels cut his teeth as a sportswriter for the Philadelphia Bulletin. It was his dream job, he says, and he enjoyed it until the early 1980s when a decline in circulation doomed the paper to closure.

Speaking to Thomas Hauser some years back, Samuels recalled his newfound plight.

"So my problem was, what do I do now? I knew Frank Gelb, who had promoted some fights with Bob Arum. Frank told me that Bob was looking for a publicist to help him with a new boxing series on a new sports network called ESPN. On Frank's recommendation, Bob hired me to do publicity for his east coast ESPN shows."

It was then that Samuels began his career in boxing, the fruits of which have earned him his recent recognition by the WBC.

Renowned matchmaker Ron Katz, who also worked with Top Rank at the time, remembers Samuels’ early days with the company fondly, and he was especially excited to tell me a story involving Samuels, Gelb, Bob Arum, fake policemen and a top ranked team of pranksters.

“This happened around the late eighties/early nineties,” he told me over the phone this week. “We had a doubleheader in Atlantic City, as we did many times in those days, and it was one of

our ESPN shows the night before one of our big network shows."

Katz said he was the architect behind the ordeal, but that he let everyone in on the fun, except our guy Lee, who he alternated referring to as "Leroy" and "Baby Leroy" during our conversation in a way that only someone from the state of New York could pull off.

"So what we did…poor Leroy…Frank Gelb, who was like the Godfather of Atlantic City back then, he had hooked up with Arum and delivered resorts for lots of the ESPN shows, Frank was the guy, so I got together with Frank and said, listen, I want to pull this prank on Baby Leroy and this is what I want to do."

Katz relayed the plan, and Gelb helped make it happen.

"So Frank got these two guys to dress up in policeman uniforms. The guy was so hooked up there that he could do almost anything he wanted. We made up these phony papers…something to do with the IRS and back taxes…we were some real pranksters back then."

Katz told me the lynchpin to the deal was having Bob Arum in on it, and that staging it during the show was likely what sealed the deal.

"These guys bust in right in the middle of the show and go right up to Lee and serve him these phony papers. Poor Lee, he turned white as a ghost! We were all sitting there biting out tongues, cracking up…I mean everybody knew about it! Even our ESPN announcers back then… everyone was in on it!"

Katz says the crew of pranksters had Samuels sweat it out the entire length of the fight card.

"Listen guys," Arum told the fake policemen when they tried to haul Samuels out the door. "Just let him work the rest of the show and then we'll go in the back and we'll see what this is about,

and if you have to take him to jail, you take him."

By this time, Katz said people could hardly contain themselves, but they managed to leave Samuels in the lurch until the very end.

"So finally at the end of the night, we went to the back and told him we were all just pulling a prank on him."

Katz told me Samuels took all of it in good humor, and after hearing from so many people who have worked with him over the years, it honestly doesn't surprise me.

"Lee was just that kind of guy, and he still is, where he just took it all in stride, you know? He's a great guy and always has been. He's just a nice, nice guy and he does a good job," Katz said with genuine affection in voice.

"That's Leroy."