



"Life is short; we get old so fast. It doesn't make sense to waste time on hating." -- Muhammad Ali (1995)

Everyone in boxing is part of the larger sporting community and society as a whole. Thus, it's worth looking at an issue that has gathered significant attention in recent months.

Earlier this summer, Russian president Vladimir Putin signed a law that allows the government to prosecute, imprison, and fine individuals if they engage in "propaganda of non-traditional sexual relations" that is likely to be heard or read by minors. In practice, the law bars the public advocacy of gay rights and gay relationships anywhere that those under the age of eighteen might hear or read about the discussion (for example; in schools, on the streets, or in the

Issues and Answers

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Thursday, 22 August 2013 09:33

media).

One might ask what the reaction would be if a similar law barred the teaching of Judaism or tolerance of Judaism.

Or Christianity.

Homophobia is rampant and codified into law in many parts of the world today. Our own nation has confronted the issue of gay rights in recent decades. But unlike Russia, the United States has been moving toward a position of tolerance and understanding.

The 2014 Winter Olympics are scheduled to be held in Sochi on the coast of the Black Sea in Russia from February 7 through February 23.

Soon after the law in question was signed by Putin, Vitaly Mutko (Russia's minister of sports) declared, "An athlete of non-traditional sexual orientation isn't banned from coming to Sochi. But if he goes out into the streets and starts to propagandize, then of course he will be held accountable."

Then Alexander Zhukov (head of the Russian National Olympic Committee) stated that gay athletes could participate in the Winter Olympics without fear of reprisal as long as they didn't promote a gay lifestyle.

There are many ways that the United States can respond to Russia's anti-gay legislation. Or it can choose not to respond at all.

One suggestion has been that the United States boycott the Sochi Olympics. Would that boycott be appropriate?

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The United States boycotted the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow to protest the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan without significant result. China has a long history of ignoring human rights, but the United States Olympic team was in Beijing in full force in 2008.

And let's be honest; there's division within the United States on the issue of gay rights. Indeed, when the Summer Olympics (Atlanta, 1996) and Winter Olympics (Salt Lake City, 2002) were last held here, homosexual acts between consenting adults were crimes punishable by imprisonment in Georgia and Utah.

John Carlos won a bronze medal in the 200-meter dash at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. He and gold-medal winner Tommie Smith (a fellow U.S. Olympian) became indelibly etched in the civil rights movement when they silently raised black-gloved fists during the medal presentation ceremony.

Carlos opposes a boycott of the Sochi Olympics. Last month, he told writer Dave Zirin, "If you stay home, your message stays home with you. To be heard is to be greater than a boycott. Had we stayed home, we'd never have been heard from again."

Carlos's thoughts echo those of Arthur Ashe (the greatest African-American male tennis player ever). Twenty-four years ago, I spoke with Ashe about a similar decision that he'd faced.

"In 1967," Ashe reminisced, "the Davis Cup draw came up. And lo and behold, the United States was supposed to meet South Africa in the third round. I was thinking to myself, 'Oh, my God. Just three months ago, Muhammad Ali refused [induction into the United States Army]. And here I am, the only black player in tennis, the main member of the Davis Cup team.' Fortunately, the president of the United States Tennis Association then was Robert Kelleher, a wonderful man. We talked about it, and he suggested that the most effective way to deal with the situation would be for us to give up the home-court advantage. We had what was known as choice of ground. Kelleher told me, 'Let's do something that has never been done in the history of Davis Cup competition. Let's offer to play South Africa in South Africa and go down there and beat the crap out of them. Let South Africa see a black person win in their own backyard.'"

That moment never came. South Africa was ousted from the Davis Cup competition by West Germany in the second round. But Ashe's point is well-taken.

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It's the same point that was made by Barack Obama on August 9 when he declared, "One of the things I'm really looking forward to is maybe some gay and lesbian athletes bringing home the gold or silver or bronze, which I think would go a long way in rejecting the kind of attitudes that we're seeing there."

So let me offer a suggestion. The United States Olympic team should compete in Sochi on two conditions.

First, the United States Olympic Committee should design the jackets worn by our athletes during the opening and closing ceremonies and also the uniforms worn in competition so that the clothing has a clearly visible symbol of respect for all people regardless of their race, color, religion, or sexual orientation. A rainbow would be nice.

And second, the flag-bearer who leads the United States delegation into the stadium at the opening ceremonies should be an openly gay athlete.

There's a quotation in silver letters on a gray wall at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. It reads as follows:

First they came for the socialists.

And I did not speak out because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists.

And I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.

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Then they came for the Jews.

And I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me.

And there was no one left to speak for me.

* * *

Alan Hopper announced on August 20 that he's leaving his job as vice president for public relations at Don King Productions (which he has held since 2000) to pursue a career in the health-care sector.

Hopper has been on a remarkable roller-coaster ride over the past thirteen years. Don King is a publicist's dream and also a publicist's nightmare.

"Don's reputation precedes him, the good and the bad," Alan told me years ago. "Things being the way they are, he expects to get more than his fair share of criticism and blame. But Don's worldwide fame is clearly a plus for what I do, and he's a public relations genius. Whatever 'it' is, Don has it and Don gets it. He values the media, which makes my job much easier. And he has an absolutely amazing ability to create sound-bytes off the top of his head. Nobody in boxing since Muhammad Ali has come close."

"Working for Don is crazy," Alan added. "He keeps no schedule. Everything is subject to change. He does what he wants to do when he wants to do it. He might call up and say, 'We're having a press conference in China in two days.' And he expects you to get it done. I never know what will happen when I go to work in the morning."

Issues and Answers

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Hopper did an extraordinary job. He was a tireless worker, who was always honest with the media while keeping the best interests of his employer in mind. Whenever someone asked for help, he tried to help. He was unfailingly friendly and polite to everyone and treated everyone with respect; not just the representatives of major media outlets.

Alan's departure is another sign that the extraordinary career of Don King is nearing an end. Meanwhile, it should be noted that a handful of boxing media relations specialists have done their job as well as Alan Hopper. But no one has ever done it better or with a more generous spirit.

Thomas Hauser can be reached by email at thouser@rcn.com. His most recent book (*Thomas Hauser on Sports: Remembering the Journey*) was published by the University of Arkansas Press.

[Comment on this article](#)

Radam G says:

The issues are clear, the answers are far away and near. Nothing is never pure. We just have to endear. Holla!

kidcanvas says:

good for putin, at least he has a set of balls

amayseng says:

obama is the wrong person to use as an example to support this..

one year he is against gay marriage and the next he is supporting it for votes...

thats not someone i would want to use as an example....thats sketchy, dishonest and embarrassing

Bernie Campbell says:

Mr Hauser, Im appalled because you peddeled 41 diaries about insignificant minutia about things that don't matter in the grand scheme of things doesn't give you license to be irresponsible in your selfmade soap box! You are advocating young people indulging in harmful materials of a questionable nature by publishing this funny page? You equate the discrimination

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that this subject in question may provoke with anti-Semitism? I know some Rabbi's that would stone you for that notion! I assume you have some sort of a connection! You sound like you are legitimizing your deviant taste on the subject!

leon30001 says:

Jog on Hauser, and take your soapbox with you.

Bernie Campbell says:

Whether Putin wants to clean his bathroom with Bonami, it aint Uncle Sam's call! You think you can do a better job with Lestoil! Cmon Wake up, get rid of those pictures, Id rather read popular mechanics!

amayseng says:

Good point Bernie Campbell who is the USA to get involved, call shots or protest.

With america unable to take care of itself, near 17 trillion in debt, borrowing money from China and their

very own President in Obama who FLIP FLOPS on the topic for votes, which is as superficial and careless on

the topic as you can get, who is america to once again butt their nose in someone elses business or controversy???