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For the last few years, HBO Sport's president Ross Greenburg has done a lot of countering off the ropes, as fightwriters and industry powers have launched harsh criticism at the man who had final say over what boxing fight fans saw on HBO and HBO pay per view.

It became official on Sunday, after word leaked out Friday, via a BoxingScene.com piece by Lem Satterfield and Rick Reeno, that Greenburg is done fighting. He is leaving HBO, on his terms, he says, and is not being fired, as is the rumor du jour.

Greenburg, who has been with HBO since 1978, and took over in his current role from Seth Abraham in 2000, told the NY Times he "accomplished everything I hoped for. It was getting to the point where I wasn't enjoying myself. Boxing taking up too much of my time."

He certainly did not hope for what went down earlier in the year, when he lost the services of Manny Pacquiao, a pay per view golden goose, to rival Showtime.

Writer Thomas Hauser has been hammering away at what he deems the sad, diminishing state of affairs in the HBO boxing sphere annually, and in May, he floated a scenario that had Greenburg being ushered out the door by higher ups who weren't pleased that viewership wasn't as robust as the payouts going to iffy talent. The story was denied, heatedly by some, at HBO, but it looks like Hauser's call was on target, overall.

Greenburg had a solid run at the cabler; he didn't take heat or get flak from he fightwriter fraternity when Mike Tyson was reigning in the late 80s, and he was executive producer, and Abraham was a senior VP, above him.

Greenburg got Abraham's chair in September 2000. At the time, he said, "The No. 1 priority for me is to maintain our pre-eminent position in boxing. We've had that ever since the late '70s and we want to keep it that way." And that position stayed where it was, with HBO letting Lennox Lewis, and Oscar De La Hoya and Roy Jones pull the moneytrain. As of 2003, Greenburg was seemingly enjoying the ride.

"The most enduring characteristic of HBO Sports is our tradition of boxing excellence," he said in February of that year," while touting their 12 part documentary series "Legendary Nights." But at some point, the nights became less legendary. Sure, there were epic tussles, when the majesty of the sport was on full display, like Gatti-Ward I in May 2002. But with a decline in the marquee value of the heavyweight division came more hits to the HBO boxing armor. Vitali Klitschko fighting Danny Williams, those sorts of cruddy matchups were offered more frequently to subscribers.

Greenburg, at the end of 2005, promised more. HBO, he said, would be "stiff in our opponent approval in the coming years" and "these fighters have got to start thinking long-term." But the flurries at Greenburg increased. "Boxing has changed. Promoters are being eliminated because the network is eliminating us. They are putting promoters out of business because they [HBO] are the promoters," Don King said in January 2006. The following January, Greenburg was again promising to put the clamp down on promoters and managers who were impediments to making, he said, the best matches that were to be made. Also, he said, looking ahead there would be fewer pay per views, fewer fringe PPV shows which hurt the growth of the sport. Fans perceived that his goal wasn't achieved.

By the summer of 2007, Greenburg wore some damage from media abuse. Hauser laced into him for mismanaging the demotion of Larry Merchant, and Merchant went public with what he viewed as shoddy treatment at the hands of Greenburg who he said tried to punt him out the door. The following summer, Greenburg was in the news, and not for the right reasons, to crow about sterling ratings or a PPV success. This time, HBO fighter Floyd Mayweather, who announced his retirement, accused the HBO announce team of being racially biased. Greenburg was forced to respond: "Floyd is a tremendous athlete who gave his all to the sport," Greenburg said in a statement. "We have nothing but admiration for what he accomplished in the ring. His remarks regarding HBO broadcasters and executives are unfortunate and we could not disagree more. We will not engage in a debate. We are very disappointed in hearing about this. We wish him well in retirement." Greenburg didn't drop the ball, really, but again, his superiors would have rather been hearing about the next great PPV attraction, the next transcendent talent, instead of juvenile squabbles.

But things looked a bit brighter when Manny Pacquiao started to get traction as something beyond a fightfan favorite. A scrap between him and Floyd Mayweather had everyone in the game gleeful, fans and suits. But Greenburg couldn't get that no brainer to fruition. Of course, there is ample blame to go around on that front. By all accounts, he tried like the dickens to get the match made. But for two years, he couldn't, and that more than anything might have paved the way to this exit.

If that match was made, it is likely that material that Hauser put out there in September 2009, on

SecondsOut.com, would not have stung like it did. “The problem,” one source says, “is that any plan Ross puts forward will be met with skepticism because, when it comes to boxing, his biggest initiatives have failed. His plan to hitch HBO’s wagon to Golden Boy and the Golden Boy output deal have been a disaster. And the idea of anointing Victor Ortiz, Alfredo Angulo, James Kirkland, Robert Guerrero, and Chris Arreola as HBO’s stars of the future doesn’t look so good.”

The faceoff between the sports' two premier talents would've made it less likely that criticism from the Hauser pen would've stung to the degree it did. A June 2010 piece delved into perceived overpayment by HBO for fights that seemingly were worth in the open market a fraction of what was paid by the cabler. Then a month later Greenburg found himself in the middle of an idiotic he said-he said beef, as Floyd Mayweather's advisor Leonard Ellerbe was quoted as saying no negotiations for a Mayweather-Pacquiao fight had taken place. Greenburg had to release a statement to the contrary, and by association, he looked that much smaller.

Hauser's "holiday card" then came out in November 2010. Quotes like this one from Bob Arum trickled down, or up, to people above Greenburg. “It’s idiotic to throw money at unproven fighters to fight second-rate opponents,” said Bob Arum to Hauser. “But that’s what HBO does, and then they’re surprised when they can’t make the fights they want. They’ve created a totally artificial market based entirely on how much money Ross and Kery [HBO senior vice president for sports programming Kery Davis] are willing to pay for a fight."

Then, this January, Greenburg absorbed what might have been the fatal blow, the shot that lead to his exit. CBS and Showtime outbid HBO for the Manny Pacquiao-Shane Mosley fight. Hauser detailed the hows and whys of that deal, and one nugget in particular made Greenburg look out of touch, too distant, not attuned to the political necessities of the deal. Promoter Arum, Hauser said, was said to be miffed that Greenburg didn't fly to a memorial for the promoter's son, John, who died last August while hiking.

It looked like all that punishment took a toll on Greenburg in May, when Hauser wrote a story for BoxingScene.com that said Greenburg was being replaced by a Yahoo exec, Ross Levinsohn. The writer backtracked when Levinsohn stayed on with Yahoo, but the story had more than a whiff of truth to it, considering that Hauser's sources within HBO are varied and deep.

In situations such as this one, many times a longstanding employee will be given the courtesy of stating publicly that the choice to leave was made by them, that nobody showed them the door. Greenburg on Sunday called several sports media columnists, and told them he was leaving on his own accord. Cynics and those that see themselves as realists are disputing his version of events in grapevine chatter.

That may all be immaterial for fight fans, who would simply like HBO, the most prominent buyer and broadcaster of boxing, to show stellar fights, as often as possible. They don't care if Ross Greenburg, or John Smith, is the one in charge of making that happen. As a fight fan, I have to hope that any change is for the better, for the greater good of a sport that deserves it.

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brownsugar says:

I dont' know if it was Greenburn or Kerry Davis who refused to recruit boxers internationally,.. but I hope who ever takes his place has the foresight to consider prospects from the international community.... tire of going to foreign sites and youtube to watch the fights that matter.