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TOURISM. Prepared Testimony of Bert Randolph Sugar, May 22, 2002.

To understand the sport of boxing, one must first understand its roots. Unlike many of today's sports, boxing did not spring full-blown from the brow of an inventor, as basketball did from the brow of Dr. James Naismith in 1896, nor date back to the happening of some specific occurrence as rugby did when, in 1823, a soccer player at Rugby school picked up the ball and ran with it.

Instead, boxing's roots are buried in antiquity, traceable, at least in part, to the practice of a form of the sport as we now know it by the ancient Sumerians approximately five thousand years ago. From there it was a short hop, skip and overhand right to other places throughout the ancient world, finally surfacing in ancient Greece around 900 B.C.. As practiced by the Greeks, the sport became less of a sport and more of a brutal spectacle, the "hands and arms enveloped in ponderous gauntlets," as Virgil wrote in the Aeneid, "stiffened in rigid coils, insewn with lead and with irons." The object was not only to win but to win by stretching (the opponent) hurt to the death on the yellow sand" of the arena. Not content with mortal hurt, the lead and iron were replaced with spikes to insure death.

With the conquest of Greece by the Holy Roman Empire, boxing became an integral part of Rome's "bread and circuses" pageantry, trained gladiators taking part in exhibitions, usually held following the chariot races and immediately preceding the wrestling and running events. Finally tiring of the wanton brutality and waste of life, Emperor Theodoric ended the gladiatorial contest

in A.D. 500, allowing only fighting with bare fists. Those, too, were soon banned, and boxing all but disappeared from the face of the globe.

Twelve centuries were to pass before boxing resurfaced in what had once been a Roman colony, England. Like Greece and Rome before it, England, in the early eighteenth century, considered sport an honorable, even noble pursuit. The manly sport of boxing befitted the Englishman's concept of himself and his country as a molder of men as neatly as a well-tailored waiscoat. Indeed, poet John Milton, in his Treatise on Education, recommended boxing for young men as an excellent athletic exercise and builder of character.

However, the sport of boxing was hardly the sport we know today, resembling more organized king of the mountain than boxing, with wrestling, choking and gouging an integral part. It remained for one man, James Figg, to bring order out of chaos and a small smattering of science to barbarity.

Figg opened an Amphitheatre on Tottenham Court Road dedicated to the teachings of "the manly art of foul play, backsword, cudgeling, and boxing." From the day it opened in 1719 it was liberally patronized by many royal and noble parsonages--"the fancy"--who supported his exhibits with their presence. Boxing, as taught by Figg, was a mere interlude to the entertainments given by exponents of cudgel play, backsword, quarterstaff, and other practices of the day.

Time has a way of mis-bestowing its memorial garland now and then. And so it is that the name James Figg endures fallaciously in the history of a sport that honors him. For even though Figg is known as the “Father of Boxing,” his fame might have the same mythic trappings as that of Abner Doubleday, who is wrongly credited with “Inventing” baseball. Figg, who professed to teaching his students the art of “scientific boxing,” was in reality teaching them nothing more than the art of fencing with the two weapons with which nature and God had endowed them, their hands. His methods, indeed even his technical terms, guards, acts, and the positioning of the feet and hands, were borrowed from fencing.

The true science of boxing had its foundation and beginning in the teachings of Jack Broughton, who pioneered in the modern art of self-defense. According to Pugilistica, “The successor to Figg in popularity, Boughton far exceeded that stalwart crudgeler in fistic science and application of those principles which stripped the practice of boxing of any of those features of ruffianism and barbarity with which the unregulated contests of mere bruisers had invested it.”

By the 19th century all of England had embraced the sport of boxing, so much so that they celebrated it in chauvinistic verse:

Since boxing is a manly game
And Britons recreation,
By boxing we will raise our fame
‘Bove any other nation.
Throw pistols poniards swords aside.
And all such deadly tools.
And boxing be the Britons pride

The science of their schools.

However, by the beginning of the 19th century the sun was already imperceptibly setting on the English boxing empire, the result of “Yankee-doodle-dom,” the influx of Americans drawn to England, thus creating the international sport of boxing.

But just as James Watt’s newfangled steam-powered ships were bringing American fighters over to England, they were also bringing boxers back across the Atlantic--now an even smaller pond, due to Mr. Watt’s invention--in effect fueling what would be the start of boxing in America.

Soon American boxing “rings”--then actually rings drawn in the sand--would be filled with immigrants from England and Ireland, all seeking to escape their hardscrabble roots and find fame and fortune.

Throughout the next century-and-a-half boxing has continued to be the refuge of those seeking to escape their roots as youngsters from the tenements, the ghettos, the projects and the barrios all used the sport as a social staircase out of the mean streets that formed their limited existences, with first the Irish, then the Jewish, Italian, African-American and Latino boxers attempting to gain full fellowship into our society by the only means of escape they possessed: their fists.

And, as they turned to boxing, many also turned their lives around, much as former middleweight champion Rocky Graziano of “Somebody Up There Likes Me” fame did. Speaking in his native New Yorkese, peppered with more than a few “dems” and doses,” Graziano would say of his less-than-exemplary behavior: “I never stole nuthin’ unless it began with a ‘A’...’A’ truck, ‘A’ car...’A’ payroll...” And then, in a telling indication of just what the sport meant to him, would add, “If it wasn’t for boxing, I woulda wounded up electrocuted at Sing Sing Prison.”

But even as they fought in hopes of finding a way out of places which offered them little presence and less of a future, they did so alone, almost naked, save for a pair of boxing trunks and two gloves. As Buster Mathis Sr. once said of his manager and trainer when they continued to use the pluralistic “we” once too often, “Where do they get that ‘we’ s--t? When the bell rings they go down the steps and I go out alone.”

It is for these warriors, boxing’s most precious commodity, that we must seek help—help they are often denied in the world outside the ring, where they can least defend themselves. And help as well for the sport itself which provides them with their sole hope of gaining admittance to full fellowship into our society.

For while each and every boxer struggles to gain his place at the top of boxing’s mountain, their climb is made all the more difficult by our country’s inequality at the international boxing table.

It is an inequality that was best articulated by WBC president Jose Sulaiman, who, when asked by New York Times columnist Dave Anderson, “Why doesn’t the United States have more of a ‘say’ in the world of boxing?” answered: ‘Because they’re unorganized and speak with 50 voices.’”

That lack of organization by the powers-that-be who run boxing, so to speak, has made our country—which can boast of supplying 60% of all boxers, 70% of all champions and 80% of all money in boxing—a second-rate power in the sport. And allowed those groups which I call “Alphabet Soups” to control the sport, most from outside the U.S..

It is for that reason that American boxing needs a way of becoming organized to the point of having one voice at the international boxing table. And why the Muhammad Ali Bill is an important first step.

For the Muhammad Ali Bill is the first piece of meaningful legislation ever to come out of Congressional hearings—most of which have been little more than fault-finding hearings about the sport, like the Roth investigation of the controversial decision in the James Toney-Dave Tiberi fight a few years back.

However, I happen to agree with the bill’s sponsor, Senator John McCain, who is quoted as

having said, “So many people have said I want a federal commission with ultimate authority. That would be a last resort. I’m a fundamental conservative, I want to limit government.”

In keeping with Senator McCain’s stated goal, we do not have to re-invent the boxing wheel; the mechanism to organize the sport is already in place. And it is called “The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws.”

This is a group that was organized in 1892—not incidentally, the same year as the John L. Sullivan-James J. Corbett fight, the fight which brought in modern boxing as we know it today, with three-minute rounds and gloves under the Marquess of Queensberry Rules.

The stated purpose of The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws is “to promote uniformity in state law on all subjects where uniformity is desirable and practicable, by voluntary action of each state government.”

As such, The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws has drafted uniform laws in many fields and then encouraged states to adopt them on a state-by-state basis as law—including such diverse laws as the UCC, the Probate Act, the Anatomical Gift Act, and the Interstate Family Support Act.

And why do we need uniform laws? My colleague, Michael DeLisa, making a speech to a

group known as the Association of Boxing Commissions back in 1994, cited the case of former heavyweight champion Bob Fitzsimmons who, in 1914 at the age of 50, applied for a license in the State of New York and was turned down by the New York State Athletic Commission. His appeal was denied by the New York Supreme Court (NY Supreme Court 146 New York Supplement 117 (1914)), and two days later Fitzsimmons went over the border and fought in the State of Pennsylvania.

Pennsylvania, in its infinite non-wisdom, gave neither reciprocity nor full faith and credit to the New York State decision--and Fitzsimmons fought in the state twice after being turned down by New York and having that denial upheld on appeal.

But one state failing to recognize another state's refusal of a license to a boxer is hardly limited to the case of Bob Fitzsimmons. In fact, it happened again this year when, after the State of Nevada refused to grant Mike Tyson a license to fight Lennox Lewis other jurisdictions lined up, with licenses in hand for Tyson-one State, Georgia, requiring only \$10 for the license, less than it costs for a dog license.

In a manner similar to the time my daughter's cat went into her hall closet and gave birth to kittens and she came down the stairs hollering, "The cat just fell apart," boxing has fallen apart, with no uniformity nor reciprocity for its rules and regulations

The world of boxing today is like the old wild, wild west, with an anything-goes as far as the boxing rules of the several states regulating the sport..

This lack of uniformity can best be seen by comparing the very definition of the word “boxing”: While Hawaii defines it as, “A contest in which the art of attack and defense is practiced with gloved fists by two contestants,” the State of Florida defines it as a “Means to compete with fists,” with nary a word about gloves contained therein.

Then there’s the difference, on a state-to-state basis, on such things as scoring, with Montana giving a 10-9, not 10-8, round to a boxer who knocked down another, with the other boxer getting up right away, thus showing he’s not hurt, while Florida will make it a 10-9 round if the fallen fighter takes a 9-count, which shows his “ring generalship,” as opposed to one who gets up immediately in a groggy condition. (And here, words like “ring generalship” are almost impossible to define, even by General George Patton.)

And so, while the Muhammad Ali Bill is the correct first step, it still does not provide for the state-to-state uniformity needed to conduct boxing in the United States, nor for the United States to be able to conduct itself as a single entity--not 50 different ones at the international boxing table.

Instead this august Committee should urge The National Conference of Commissioners on

Uniform State Laws (or the Association of Boxing Commissions) to draft a bill which every state could then adopt.

(And here, let it be known, that after years of not wanting to be involved in sports, finally in 2002, The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws approved and recommended for enactment in all states of the Uniform Athlete Agents Act.)

I believe it time the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, Foreign Commerce and Tourism urged the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform Laws to draft a uniform law covering the sport of boxing, one which would make boxing a uniform sport within our borders. And thus ensure that the noble and high-minded goals contained in the Muhammad Ali Bill become the law in all 50 states.

Thank You,

Bert Randolph Sugar