

REFEREE'S CALL:

A New Day?

by Nelson "DOC" Hamilton

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As many of you know, on September 21, 2004, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed Senate Bill 1549, giving the California State Athletic Commission (CSAC) complete control of professional and amateur boxing, kickboxing, and all forms and combinations of martial arts and contests, including mixed martial arts. FINALLY.

I have been working with and for the California State Athletic Commission since 1986. That was the year I first became licensed as a kickboxing referee. I have also been appointed to the Martial Arts Advisory Committee on four different occasions. As an advisor to the Commission, I helped to draft the rules that govern kickboxing, and most recently, mixed martial arts (MMA).

The Commission has always excelled as a regulatory agency despite its heavy handedness at times. However, in my opinion, they have failed miserably as a business. So much that kickboxing is all but dead in California and boxing is dying. They never quite grasped the concept that, like it or not, they are in a competitive business and their total existence is dependent upon promoters promoting. The bottom line: To attract fight sport business, the state must become promoter friendly and market itself as such. If they don't, promoters will stop promoting or take their business to another state.

Bobby Dylan

At one time or another, we've all heard the expression, "I never thought I'd live long enough to see blank, blank, blank happen." You fill in the blank. Well, I'm very happy to say that I have lived long enough. I will explain.

On November 9, 2004, I attended the Commission meeting. To paraphrase a Bob Dylan song, there is a change blowing in the wind. At that meeting, I heard the chairman and various commission members say things like: "We are multi-disciplinary and not just a boxing organization, and we have legislative mandate from the governor to be promoter friendly and promote the sports under our jurisdiction." It was music to my ears!

In addition to the governor's mandate to become promoter friendly and to promote the various sports under its jurisdiction, it appears that a prime motivating factor for its business-like approach is that CSAC is now self-funding and no longer a part of the state's general fund. In other words, if they don't bring in enough money to operate, they go out of business. If you couple that with a \$300,000 loan that must be repaid in two years, they have a lot of motivation to employ some tried and true basic business concepts.

Wait and See

On January 27, 2005 (This issue went to press in mid- December), we will see if CSAC can walk the walk as well as they talk the talk. That is the scheduled date for the commission to make the decision as to which rules will be adopted to regulate MMA. In my opinion, a decision to make some minor modifications to the previously adopted rules would send the message that they have every intention of being promoter friendly. In my opinion, a decision to restrict the rules to those already adopted would send the message that they decided to play it safe and march in lock step with other well known state commissions. Keep your fingers crossed and say a prayer.