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In the Matter of WBO Jr. Flyweight Contender, Mr. Regie Suganob

Parties:

Mr. Floriezyl E. Podot, Esq., CPA.

Promoter

PMI Bohol Boxing Promotion

On behalf of WBO Jr. Flyweight Contender, Mr. Regie Suganob

ISSUE PRESENTED

To determine who is more deserving of the mandatory challenger designation in the WBO Jr. Flyweight Division between the number one world-rated contender, Mr. Regie Suganob, and the number two world-rated contender, Mr. Rene Santiago, in accordance with our governing rules and regulations, this Committee has undertaken a thorough review.

Having considered the arguments presented by both petitioners, reviewed their respective professional records and achievements, carefully evaluated their compliance with the required criteria for mandatory challenger designation, and examined the relevant provisions applicable to this case, the Committee concludes that Mr. Rene Santiago satisfies the required criteria substantially more than Mr. Regie Suganob.

The rationale for this ruling is detailed below.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

On January 4, 2025, Mr. Floriezyl E. Podot, Esq., CPA, emailed WBO President Mr. Gustavo Olivieri, Esq., to inform him that Mr. Regie Suganob had fought Mr. Nanthanon Thongchau on December 21, 2024, in the Philippines and won via TKO in the third (3rd) round. In his communication, Mr. Podot requested that the WBO grant Mr. Suganob an opportunity to fight the WBO Jr. Flyweight Champion, Mr. Shokichi Iwata, for the WBO Jr. Flyweight Championship, alleging that Mr. Regie Suganob is the mandatory challenger.

On January 5, 2025, Mr. Gustavo Olivieri, Esq., acknowledged receipt of the communication and informed Mr. Podot that the request would be referred to the World Championship Committee for consideration and an applicable ruling.

On January 10, 2025, Mr. Gustavo Olivieri, Esq., formally referred Mr. Floriezyl E. Podot, Esq., CPA's request to this Committee for its consideration.

On January 19, 2025, Mr. Felix Zabala Jr. emailed WBO President Mr. Gustavo Olivieri, Esq., requesting that the current number two world-rated contender and WBO International Champion, Rene Santiago, be designated as the mandatory

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challenger, arguing (i) that the fighter in question was more deserving for such designation considering his compliance with the WBO rules and regulations; (ii) satisfied the ABC ratings criteria (iii) satisfied other relevant factors, including but not limited to level of opposition, activity, having won multiple regional titles, and former WBO Interim World Champion, etc.

Therefore, having reviewed the communication from Mr. Floriezyl E. Podot, Esq., CPA, along with the facts presented herein, the circumstances of the instant case, and the WBO Regulations of World Championship Contests—including their applicability and enforcement in this matter—and acting under the authority conferred by the rules, it is hereby determined as follows:

APPLICABLE PROVISIONS

All parties agree that they are bound by the WBO Regulations of World Championship Contests. Section 35(f) provides in relevant: ***“These Regulations apply to all WBO Participants. The term WBO Participant includes, but not limited to, WBO World Champions and WBO World Championship Contenders. All WBO Participants who participate in any WBO sanctioned activity do so on the express condition that such WBO Participant is bound by and subject to these WBO World Championship Rules and all WBO Rules and Regulations”.*** [Emphasis Added]. As such, this Committee has jurisdiction and the authority conferred by its rules to resolve the matter at issue accordingly.

The WBO World Championship Committee’s authority to consider the issue at hand is governed under Sections 1 (b) and (19) (f), (g), and (h), respectively of the WBO Rules and Regulations of World Championship Contests, which provide, in relevant as follows:

SECTION 6. DESIGNATION OF THE MANDATORY CHALLENGER

(a) The Mandatory Challenger may be selected and determined by the World Championship Committee according to the current list of the best-classified boxers, promulgated by the WBO Classification Committee. The World Championship Committee shall for good cause designate the date on which the determination of the Mandatory Challenger shall be determined. For the purpose of designating the Mandatory Challenger, the current list of the Classifications is that which corresponds to the month for which the designation of the Mandatory Challenger is to be made that the World Champion is obliged to defend his Title against the Mandatory Challenger, or any other date in which the World Championship Committee may determine, for just cause.

(b) When a Champion must make a mandatory defense, the Mandatory Challenger shall be the highest classified available boxer who, in the judgment of the World Championship Committee, best satisfies the following criteria:

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(1) Has a record acceptable to the World Championship Committee, and who, because of accomplishment and achievement, is recognized by the World Championship Committee as a class boxer; and

(2) Complies with the WBO and Association of Boxing Commissions Criteria for the Ratings of Professional Boxers; and

(3) In the event that the Champion has a contract with a major television network (HBO, SHOWTIME, ZDF, Sky or other similar broadcast company), is an acceptable challenger to the Champion's television network.

(c) A classified boxer may request recognition as Mandatory Challenger in writing to the WBO on a form which contain substantially the provisions of the Application for Designation as Mandatory Contender contained on the WBO web site. Alternatively, the Committee may designate a Mandatory Challenger based on the above criteria. In either event, the Mandatory Challenger must agree to be subject to and to abide by the Regulations and to be bound to participate in and comply with the results of a purse bid. The World Championship Committee may deny a request for recognition based on any of the above referred criteria or because the Champion has an approved unification bout, or an approved unification tournament is scheduled, or if the Champion is contesting the Championship with a WBO Super Champion or a WBO Champion, or for other good cause.

(d) If a fighter is classified higher than the Mandatory Challenger and is not designated the Mandatory Challenger because of criteria three (3), or for other good cause, the Championship Committee has the authority to order an eliminatory bout between the higher classified boxer or boxers provided that at least one of the elimination bout contestants is considered an acceptable challenger to the Champion's broadcast company. The winner of the elimination bout shall be then designated the Mandatory Challenger.

(e) The designation of a Mandatory Challenger creates an obligation on behalf of the Champion to defend against the designated Mandatory Challenger as a condition to the Champion's retention of the title. This obligation may be subject to modification or extension by the Championship Committee for good cause, such as (but not limited to) participation by the Champion in a unification bout or a unification tournament on such terms and conditions as the Championship Committee approves. The designation of Mandatory Challenger does not create rights in the Challenger, and may be subject to such conditions, modification, or extension as the Championship Committee determines.

(f) That a Champion has signed a contract for the defense of his championship, even against a Mandatory Challenger approved and designated by the Committee, shall not of itself constitute compliance with these Regulations, unless the Championship defense actually takes place within the stipulated time period.

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SECTION 8. CRITERIA TO MAINTAIN RATING AS A CLASSIFIED FIGHTER

(a) *To keep his position on the official WBO classification list and to be eligible to be designated by the World Championship Committee as the Mandatory Challenger, contender number 1 and contender number 2 shall defend his classification at least annually against any of the classified contenders in his weight category, according to the current list of classifications promulgated by the Classifications Committee, and he shall comply with the Association of Boxing Commissions Criteria for Ratings of Professional Boxers. If contender number 1 and/or contender number 2 fails to comply with this Rule, contender number 1 and/or contender number 2 may lose his classification. It is the responsibility of each classified boxer to know the WBO and ABC Criteria for Ratings, to meet the criteria for ratings, and to keep the WBO Classification Committee informed of all facts relevant to his rating.*

(b) *If any of the classified boxers (with the exception of contender number 1 and/or contender number 2) rejects the World Champion in an optional title fight or refuses to fight contender number 1 and/or contender number 2 in a ten-round fight, without just cause, he may be eliminated from or lowered in the list of classifications.*

ANALYSIS

We begin our *ratio decidendi* referencing an excerpt of the WBO preamble¹, which states in relevant "...The World Boxing Organization's Regulations of World Championship Contests are intended to reconcile the interests of all necessary elements of World Championship Boxing in a manner that is in the best interests of the sport. The most important interests are those of the Championship contestants themselves and their worldwide fans..."

The issue in the instant case requires consideration of numerous factors, including but not limited to:

- (i) Mr. Regie Suganob's world rating;
- (ii) whether Mr. Regie Suganob has complied with §§ 6 and 8 of the World Boxing Organization Regulations of World Championship Contests; and
- (iii) the rights and interests of other WBO participants seeking a world title opportunity in the division in question.

Regarding the first factor, it is critical to review Mr. Suganob's world-rating track record. The petitioner entered the WBO Jr. Flyweight World Ratings in March 2023 at the number 4 position. He achieved this ranking after defeating the then-number 2 world-rated contender, Mark Vicelles (17-0-0), via technical decision on February 25, 2023, at the Calape Cultural Center in Calape, Philippines. Notably, this bout was an IBF Eliminator. Subsequently, Mr. Suganob moved up to the number 3 position as a result of the routine monthly ratings adjustments in the Jr. Flyweight Division (e.g., wins, losses, activity level, inactivity, or unavailability).



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However, he was removed from the rankings in July 2023 after losing via unanimous decision to Sivenathi Nontshinga in a bout for the IBF Jr. Flyweight Championship.

Four months later, in November 2023, Mr. Sukanob returned to the WBO Jr. Flyweight Ratings, occupying the number 7 position after winning the vacant WBO Global (Regional) Jr. Flyweight title against Ronald Chacon (30-2-1) via unanimous decision on November 4, 2023, at the Holy Name University Gymnasium in Tagbilaran City, Philippines. As a result of subsequent monthly ratings adjustments, Mr. Sukanob climbed to the number 3 position in January 2024. However, in March 2024, he was demoted to the number 4 position due to then-number 11 world-rated contender Jairo Noriega's victory over then-number 7 world-rated contender Azael Villar for the WBO Jr. Flyweight Latino Title. Following this, the Ratings Committee installed Mr. Noriega at the number 2 position, demoted Angel Acosta (WBO International Champion) to the number 3 position, and moved Mr. Sukanob to the number 4 spot.

On April 30, 2024, Mr. Sukanob successfully defended his regional title against unrated participant Mr. Kai Ishizawa (11-3-0), securing a victory via TKO in the 8th round. This bout was held at the Holy Name University Gymnasium in Tagbilaran City, Philippines. Subsequently, in October 2024, Mr. Sukanob moved up to the number 1 position due to the vacancy of the WBO Jr. Flyweight Championship. The vacant title was contested on October 13, 2024, between the top two world-rated contenders at the time, number 1 Shokichi Iwata and number 2 Jairo Noriega, in a bout held at the Ariake Arena in Koto-Ku, Tokyo, Japan.

In other words, Mr. Sukanob's ascension to the number 1 position in the WBO Jr. Flyweight Ratings occurred by default, not as a result of defeating a world-rated contender.

Finally, on December 13, 2024, Mr. Sukanob participated in a non-title bout against unrated fighter Nanthanon Thongchai (13-2-2) in Tagbilaran City, Philippines. After a thorough review of Mr. Sukanob's WBO world-rating history, **the petitioner has faced only one world-rated contender during a period of 1 year with 10 months and 30 days.**

This Committee must now responsibly review and evaluate Mr. Santiago's rating track record to assess and determine whether he is more deserving of the mandatory challenger designation while occupying the second spot in the WBO Jr. Flyweight ratings.

Mr. Santiago entered the WBO Jr. Flyweight Ratings in December 2022 after winning the WBO Jr. Flyweight Latino Championship against then-number 9 **world-rated contender Gerardo Zapata** via disqualification. As a result, Mr. Santiago was installed at the number 11 position. Subsequently, in April 2023, he moved up to the number 5 position after successfully defending his WBO regional title against

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unrated Carlos Ortega (15-6-3), winning via TKO in a bout held at the Coliseo de Combates Pandeportes, Panama City, Panama. Between July and October 2023, Mr. Santiago moved up one more position to number 4 due to ordinary movements in the Jr. Flyweight division.

In October 2023, then-WBO Jr. Flyweight Champion Jonathan Gonzalez was scheduled to defend his title against then-world-rated contender Gerardo Zapata. However, due to a medical condition suffered by Gonzalez during fight week, the main event was postponed. As a result, Mr. Santiago, who was scheduled to fight then-number 15 **world-rated contender Kevin Vivas** (7-0-0), contested for the Interim version of the WBO Jr. Flyweight title. This decision was made considering the following:

- (i) the production of the show was already set;
- (ii) ticket sales had been processed;
- (iii) sponsorships and endorsements had been paid;
- (iv) the TV network and personnel were on-site; and
- (v) Santiago and Vivas were the first two available contenders who were ready, willing, and able to fight, as they were part of the co-main event of the boxing show.

Therefore, this Committee ruled that, in the best interests of boxing, granting sanction approval for the bout was justified. Mr. Santiago won the Interim Jr. Flyweight Championship, which was later consolidated (Champion vs. Champion) against Jonathan Gonzalez (27-3-1) to determine a unified champion in the division. Gonzalez won the bout via unanimous decision, held at the Coliseo Jose Miguel Agrelot in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Following this, Mr. Santiago's next bout was against another **world-rated contender, Ricardo Astuvilca** (23-2-0), who was ranked number 14 in the Jr. Flyweight Ratings at the time. Santiago, then rated number 6, won via unanimous decision to claim the WBO International title, moving up to the number 2 position in the division.

In summary, **Mr. Santiago (13-4-0) has faced three world-rated contenders over a two-year period.** His last five out of six opponents have participated in world championship fights. Additionally, he has won the WBO Latino and International Jr. Flyweight titles, the WBO Interim Jr. Flyweight Championship, and has successfully defended his rating position at least once during 2023 and 2024. This last criterion is pivotal to our ruling today.

Whereas Mr. Regie Sukanob, as the number one world-rated contender in the Jr. Flyweight Division, must comply with §8 of the World Boxing Organization Regulations of World Championship Contests, which requires classified boxers to defend their rating position at least annually against other classified contenders in

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their respective category. Failure to do so may result in the Ratings Committee excluding the non-compliant participant from the rankings.

The record shows that Mr. Suganob's fights within the last year have been against unrated opponents, which does not satisfy this critical criterion. The rules clearly state that it is the responsibility of each classified boxer to understand the WBO and ABC Criteria for Ratings, to meet the necessary criteria, and to keep the WBO Classification Committee informed of all facts relevant to their rating.

Conversely, **it is important to emphasize that occupying the number one position in the ratings of a particular weight category does not automatically confer mandatory challenger designation. In other words, this designation does not operate "Ex Propio Vigore."** Precedent in our rulings demonstrates this principle, as evidenced by WBO Jr. Lightweight contenders Albert Bell and Archie Sharp, who at different times held the number one position in that division. Nevertheless, neither fighter faced rated opposition nor competed within the required timeframe. Simply put, a world-rated contender must defend their rating position against other world-rated, suitable opponents in compliance with the WBO and ABC Ratings Criteria.

Therefore, after carefully considering the arguments presented herein, assessing the professional merits of each participant, and reviewing the applicable provisions relevant to this matter, this Committee is of the opinion that Santiago, as the next highest available contender occupying the number 2 position in the Jr. Flyweight Ratings, is more deserving of the mandatory challenger designation than Suganob. This determination is based on the facts, professional merits, and compliance with the relevant rules and regulations outlined above.

DECISION - WBO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP COMMITTEE

Having carefully reviewed and appraised the facts and particularities stated herein, having reviewed the relevant provisions, and having examined our governing rules and regulations, this Committee resolves as follows:

1. The WBO Championship Committee hereby rules as follows:

a. Mr. Floriezyl E. Podot, Esq., CPA, request on behalf of Mr. Reggie Suganob to be declared the Mandatory Challenger in the WBO Jr. Flightweight is herein denied.

b. Mr. René Santiago, currently the #2 Contender within the WBO Jr. Flightweight Division is the "next highest available contender" having complied with the WBO regulations of world championship contests and thus is declared the Mandatory Challenger.

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2. The Committee reserves its right to issue all further rulings and determinations necessary, helpful, and convenient to accomplish the purposes, policies, and intent of the WBO Rules and Regulations, including but not limited to serving the best interests of boxing, the World Boxing Organization (WBO), and its Jr. Flyweight Division.

This is a final decision of the WBO Championship Committee. The affected WBO participant may appeal such determination to the Complaint and Grievance Committee as per Rule 34, which as per Article 3(e) of the WBO Appeals Regulation must be submitted in writing to the WBO President within fourteen (14) days of this decision as its sole and exclusive remedy.

Dated: January 22, 2025
San Juan, Puerto Rico

WBO CHAMPIONSHIP COMMITTEE

By: Luis Batista Salas, Esq.

Chairman/Championship Committee

Cc: Gustavo Olivieri, Esq./WBO President
Mr. Floriezył E. Podot, Esq., CPA/ Team Sukanob
Felix Zabala/All Star Boxing/Team Santiago

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