

Evaluation IBA Congress

May 13-14, 2022

Fight for the Olympic future of Boxing is taking place outside of the ring

An important event took place alongside the Women's World Boxing Championships in Istanbul. On May 13 and 14, 2022, IBA held its Election Congress that was intended to ensure a complete change of leadership, as requested by the International Olympic Committee. This is one of the criteria of the IOC for IBA's reinstatement as an Olympic governing body. IBA needed to ensure a fair election and allow new elected individuals to continue manage boxing in a new way.

Unfortunately, the election was highly compromised and the boxing community left feeling confused about what has happened at the IBA Congress in Istanbul. Even the IOC President declared a few days ago that he was "not amused" and that "it was not a sign of good governance" in IBA. Since the IOC holds the Olympic fate of boxing in their hands, this is a very bad sign.

Most National Federation delegates were leaving the Turkish capital without much understanding of what they had witnessed. Was there an election? Why were some candidates, including Boris van der Vorst, declared ineligible shortly before the election? Are all decisions of the Congress final, including Kremlev's reappointment "by acclamation" as the IBA President? It is important to go a bit back in time to the very start of this year, when a group of IBA National Federations, including the NBB, addressed Kremlev privately, requesting a meeting to discuss issues around the exclusion of boxing from the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Program. Kremlev declined this meeting in a public answer and said he wanted to discuss all issues publicly, in the spirit of complete transparency. This marked the beginning of the Common Cause Alliance (CCA) of IBA National Federations, that ultimately grew to 17 National Federations. The goal of this initiative was simple:

Support and help steer IBA, an organization under IOC suspension, towards its reinstatement within the Olympic Movement. Secure an Olympic future for the sport of boxing at all costs. Of course that meant that many uncomfortable questions were asked from the CCA to Kremlev, as well as many critical unresolved matters raised.

In March, some individuals from National Federations participating in the CCA initiative submitted their candidatures for elective positions at the Congress in Istanbul. Boris van der Vorst became the only competitor to Kremlev, the only one brave enough to challenge the incumbent Russian President.

Boris offered a different path of development for boxing, focused on Olympic values, sustainable management and fair bouts.

It was then that complaints from two NFs against Boris van der Vorst and four other candidates for Board of Directors elections were received by the BIU Interim Nomination Unit on April 11 and 13, 2022. These complaints claimed violations of election regulations on behalf of the CCA-related candidates, as well as participation in another international boxing organization. The vetting company, hired by the Interim Nomination Unit, received two written answers from Boris on this matter by April 25, the same day they were requested.

The Interim Nomination Unit forwarded the matter to the IBA Disciplinary Committee (DC) on April 28, 2022, asking if the behaviors described in the complaints constitute a breach of the Disciplinary Code. The IBA DC requested additional answers from the accused on May 6 and received them timely.

Boris and other accused were fully cleared by the IBA Disciplinary Committee on May 11, 2022. The decision stated:

- the CCA (Common Cause Alliance, a group of 17 IBA National Federations) is not an “international boxing organization” as contemplated the Constitution
- the mission and goals of the CCA are in alignment with and supportive of IBA’s mission and goals and no existence of an actual conflict of interest has been shown by the evidence
- The CCA is a grouping of national boxing federations, not of individuals, and neither the CCA’s communications with the IBA President and other national federations, nor the CCA’s actions generally can on the evidence be imputed to the accused candidates personally
- The CCA communications did not amount to electoral campaigning in the sense of announcing the intention of any candidates to seek election or canvassing support for any of the accused parties
- There is no evidence of any collaboration or collusion between the candidates as representatives of the CCA for any anti-democratic or illegal purposes

Most would agree that this should have concluded any inquiry. Nevertheless, on May 9, 2022 the BIU Interim Nomination Unit suddenly reached out to all accused and requested clarifications again, stating that the decision of the Interim Nomination Unit would be rendered irrespective of the IBA DC. Answers were timely provided. Again.

On May 12, less than 24 hours prior to the scheduled presidential election, all candidates were ruled ineligible with a very contrasting reasoning, to the one provided by the Disciplinary

Committee:

- It is not excluded that the creation of the CCA could be the first step towards the creation of a new international boxing federation, despite no evidence at this time.
- It is obvious that the members of this organization would naturally support the CCA candidates, because this organization can be used to promote the election of specific candidates. That constitutes a distortion of competition and, a breach of the IBA Regulations on Congress and Elections.
- The Common Cause Alliance is to be considered in reality as a mean to start the election campaign of those candidates who were part of it, before the official start.
- The creation of CCA is not necessary. It is clearly an effort to create a counter-power in the IBA in curtailing the legal and statutory bodies and to influence the vote in the elections for IBA Board positions. The creation of this type of organization is the expression of a struggle for power. Its objective, unacknowledged, but obvious is: May 2022 elections.
- by creating and/or participating in the CCA, the candidates concerned by this decision violated the high standards of conduct expected from all candidates and also their duty of fidelity to the federation.

One does not need a law degree to notice that the decisions of the Disciplinary Committee and the Interim Nomination Unit are strikingly contrasting, with the Nomination Unit time after time referring to the CCA as an organization, while the Disciplinary Committee ruled that it is not an organization according to the IBA Constitution. The DC also acknowledged that the CCA is a group of National Federations and not specific individuals.

The DC stated that the goals of the CCA are in line and in support of the IBA, whereas the Interim Nomination Unit deemed it to be “a struggle for power”.

Since the new constitution provides for the Interim Nomination Unit to hold final say over the eligibility of all election candidates, Boris van der Vorst and other accused did not take part in the election and Kremelov was elected by acclamation.

The timing of the decision to scratch out the names from the list left no time for a constitutional challenge, which offers five days to submit an appeal to CAS and another ten days for a decision to be rendered. Despite the elections taking place, four candidates whose eligibility had been taken away, still submitted CAS appeals on May 17, 2022, within the allowed time. Boris and others declared their determination to overturn the decision of the Interim Nomination Unit and, therefore, offer the IBA family a fair election of the President to take place. We are now eagerly anticipating the outcome of the confidential legal proceedings in the mains sports court of the world.

If CAS overturns the decision of the Interim Nomination Unit, Boris and fellow candidates should get a chance to have a new election. If IBA does not offer this possibility, it is highly likely that boxing will be deprived of the right to remain an Olympic sport. We wish Boris good luck in his effort to defend the Olympic values in boxing and hope for justice to be restored.

Unfortunately, these affairs take away the attention from top level boxing that was taking place in Istanbul. We all supported Chelsey Heijnen and she made us all proud by winning a bronze medal in 63kg weight category.