

FBI Sting Aimed At Don King

Agent with concealed tape attempted to infiltrate boxing promoter's business



AP Photo

Promoter Don King: A target of FBI's ongoing investigation into boxing

By Manny Topol

THE FBI USED an Abscam-type sting operation in 1983 in which an undercover agent posed as a wealthy fight promoter in an apparently unsuccessful attempt to infiltrate boxing and catch promoter Don King committing illegal acts.

Working with people connected with boxing — including a reputed organized crime figure and a Brooklyn civil-rights activist — the undercover agent met with King and made a secret recording of the brief meeting, Newsday has learned. No charges have been filed against King as a result of this operation. King, however, was indicted last month in a separate investigation on charges of conspiring to evade federal taxes on more than \$1 million in income.

The undercover operation, part of the FBI's ongoing, four-year investigation of boxing, was an attempt to infiltrate boxing and King's operation. By arranging business deals with King, the FBI may have believed it could catch King committing acts of bribery, extortion or skimming.

"It would be inappropriate for us to comment at this time with regard to any undercover operation that may have been conducted by the FBI," Lane Bonner, a spokesman for the FBI in Washington, said about the King affair.

On the advice of counsel, King declined to comment.

The undercover agent, Victor Quintana, worked

with Reggie Barrett, who was known as a "hanger-on" by people in the boxing business and who often boasted of a friendship with former heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali. The two created a bogus fight promotion company — TKO Promotions — and made it known that they had a bankroll of \$7 million to \$10 million. Sources said an Illinois bank claimed that the two did have millions of dollars on account.

The two started by letting it be known in boxing circles in New Jersey and New York that they were interested in getting into the business of promoting big-time bouts as fast as they could, and that they were willing to spend huge sums of money to get their way.

Assisted by another boxing figure, Chet Cummings, an occasional trainer and promoter in New Jersey, they met reputed organized crime figure John Franzese, commonly known as Sonny, who was attending a fight in Atlantic City with his son, Michael. They believed that Sonny Franzese could arrange a meeting with King. Franzese asked his son, an independent movie producer, to set up the meeting. Through various contacts, a friend of King's, the Rev. Al Sharpton — a Brooklyn civil-rights activist and president of the National Youth Movement, a black self-help, civil-rights group — was asked to act as an intermediary. He called King and the meeting was arranged for Dec. 12, 1983.

The meeting was attended by Sharpton, King, and Michael Franzese. After they met with King first to assure him that TKO had money and was willing to spend it, Barrett and the FBI agent, who wore a hidden body recorder to tape the conversation, joined the group.

Part of the recording of the encounter between Barrett, the FBI agent and King was obtained by Newsday. In that portion, King said he was on his way to Puerto Rico, where he was promoting a fight, and would then be in Cleveland. King agreed to consider a proposal but said he wanted to wait to hear from Michael Franzese. Franzese, who apparently was unaware of the sting operation, decided not to do any business with Quintana and Barrett in boxing promotions.

Quintana used a tape recorder with a voice-activated microphone. As a result, the tapes are unclear and contain much small talk between Quintana and Barrett, street noise and even sounds that may be flushing toilets. No specific offers to King could be heard.

A voice that easily can be identified as King's is heard greeting Quintana and Barrett. "How ya doin'?" he is heard asking.

Quintana is heard saying he would try to catch up with King in Puerto Rico to continue discussing possible deals.

"Good, good. That would be great," King said. TKO Promotions continued unsuccessfully to try to involve King in boxing promotions. Quintana and Barrett apparently then turned their attention to Michael Franzese and the movie business. They flew to Los Angeles to see Franzese's business operation for possible investment. Nothing, however, became of their efforts, as Franzese broke off his relationship with Quintana and Barrett. The FBI, however, is continuing its investigation of King.

Barrett was arrested recently on cocaine-dealing charges and imprisoned in South Carolina, state of

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officials there said, when he was taken from the Charleston county jail by federal marshals. He is believed to still be in custody, one Charleston official said.

King has been a major part of the investigation by the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. It started in 1981 and eventually included the empaneling of a grand jury that heard testimony from then-WBC heavyweight champion Larry Holmes and Holmes' trainer, Richie Giachetti.

The charges by the IRS apparently stem from a separate investigation. King is charged with conspiring to evade federal taxes on more than \$1 million in income, much of it in cash advanced by Caesars Palace casino in Las Vegas.

According to the 23-count indictment, King started the scheme in 1977 after he began promoting fights at Caesars Palace and collecting cash advances from a cage at Caesars' casino. There were 14 such payments, according to the indictment, ranging from \$2,000 to \$70,000. No charges were lodged against the casino.

King is charged with not reporting \$422,000 in personal income for 1978-80 and failing to pay \$211,000 in taxes. In addition, his corporation is charged with not reporting \$407,000 in gross receipts. Also, his secretary, Constance Harper, the vice president of Don King Productions, is charged with not reporting \$195,000 in income and failing to pay \$94,000 in taxes.

King also was under federal scrutiny in 1977, when the FBI investigated a series of bouts he helped arrange for ABC-TV — the U.S. Boxing Championships — which involved creating phony records for fighters. The tournament was canceled because of the investigation, but no formal charges were brought against King or anyone else.

The sting operation used by the FBI against King by setting up TKO Promotions followed along the lines of Abscam — the FBI sting operation of 1980-81 in which members of Congress were arrested for accepting bribes from an agent who posed as an Arab sheik. The FBI also used a swindler, Mel Weinberg, to help them with the scheme and to act as the middleman, and hidden television cameras and recorders.

The Abscam trials resulted in the convictions of a U.S. senator and seven members of the House of Representatives. The investigative methods used in Abscam operations have been criticized as entrapment, but they have been defended by the Department of Justice and upheld by the federal courts. There has been consideration of limiting such sting operations to drug investigations and official corruption cases.



Don King and heavyweight champ Larry Holmes at a November news conference in Las Vegas.



Joe Namath



Pete Rozelle



O.J. Simpson



Roger Staubach



Frank Gatski

Namath 1 of 5 Voted Into Hall

Combined News Services

Canton, Ohio — Sixty-two-year-old Frank Gatski, a center from the 1940s and '50s, will have younger company joining him Aug. 3 when he and four others are enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Quarterbacks Joe Namath and Roger Staubach, running back O.J. Simpson, NFL commissioner Pete Rozelle and Gatski were announced yesterday as the latest to be so honored.

Namath, 41, is the first Jets player to be named to the hall. He joins his former coach Weeb Ewbank, who was elected in 1978.

Staubach and Simpson were selected in their first year of eligibility, five years after their retirement. The five bring the number of former players, coaches and executives in the hall to 128. Balloting was conducted among 29 media representatives — one from each NFL city plus a 29th designated by the Pro Football Writers Association. An individual needs 24 of the 29 votes to be elected.

Namath, a product of Alabama, began his 13-year pro career in 1965. He won rookie of the year honors, became the first quarterback to pass for more than 4,000 yards (1967) and led the Jets to a 16-7 upset of Baltimore in the 1969 Super Bowl. That event is generally considered as the key impetus for the NFL and AFL to merge.

"I'm very proud and thrilled," said Namath, who ended his career in 1977 with the Los Angeles Rams, and compiled career statistics of 1,886-for-3,762 passing for 27,663 yards and 173 touchdowns. "I'd like to congratulate the others, too," Namath said. "I'm sorry Fran didn't make it again — he certainly had the stats."

Quarterback Fran Tarkenton and running back Paul Hornung were among the seven finalists but did not receive the necessary votes. Tarkenton, who played with the Giants and Minnesota Vikings, holds the NFL records for attempts (6,467), completions (3,686), yards (47,003) and touchdowns (342).

Staubach, 42, joins defensive lineman Bob Lilly as the only Cowboys in the hall. Staubach won the 1963 Heisman Trophy as a junior at Navy, and after four years of active duty, he joined the Cowboys as a 27-year-old rookie. During his

11-year career with Dallas, Staubach led the team to victories in the 1973 and 1979 Super Bowls. He was named to the all-NFC team four times and played in four Pro Bowls.

"This is the greatest honor of my career," said Staubach, who finished with 1,685-for-2,958 passing for 22,700 yards and 153 touchdowns. "I'd like to thank my family, friends and fellow players for helping me achieve this."

Simpson, 37, the 1968 Heisman winner out of Southern California, joined the Buffalo Bills in 1969 and proceeded to gain 11,236 yards rushing and 2,142 yards receiving, for 76 touchdowns. He became the first back to top the 2,000-yard mark with 2,003 yards in 1973. He rushed for more than 1,000 yards five straight years and won the NFL rushing titles in 1972, 1973, 1975 and 1976.

"I can only echo what others have said — I'm just grateful," said Simpson, who played in five Pro Bowls before ending his career in 1979 with the San Francisco 49ers. "And, I'm thrilled to be included with players like Joe and Roger."

Rozelle, 57, is the third NFL commissioner to be elected; Joe Carr (1921-1939) and Rozelle's predecessor Bert Bell (1946-1959) previously were elected. Rozelle, a native of South Gate, Calif., became commissioner in 1960 after a career in public relations and a stint as the Los Angeles Rams' general manager. He negotiated the first league television contract (1962) and presided over the NFL's merger with the American Football League.

"My 25 years have been an interesting whirlwind," said Rozelle, whose tenure has included a player strike and both legislative and court challenges to the NFL. "To be elected to the hall brings a special pride to me."

Gatski played for the Cleveland Browns from 1946-56 (in the All-America Football Conference from 1946-49 and the NFL from 1950-56) and finished his career with Detroit in 1957. A nominee of the hall's Oldtimers Committee, he played on eight championship teams during his career. Gatski, who played collegiately at Marshall and Auburn, was named to the all-NFL team four times.

Boxer, Manager Indicted

Luis Resto, a middleweight fighter, and his former manager, Carlos (Panama) Lewis, were indicted by a Manhattan grand jury yesterday for allegedly removing the padding from Resto's gloves before a fight against Billy Ray Collins Jr. at Madison Square Garden in the summer of 1983.

Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau announced the indictment and said the grand jury had charged both men with first- and second-degree assault, tampering with a sports contest, criminal possession of a weapon (the tampered gloves) and conspiracy. The two were arraigned before Justice Harold Rothwax in Manhattan Supreme Court yesterday and each pleaded innocent. Lewis was released on \$20,000 bail and Resto was released on \$10,000 bail.

The grand jury, in handing up the indictment, charged the two defendants plotted "to insure Resto defeated Billy Ray Collins Jr. by any means fair or foul." According to the indictment, Lewis removed

half of the padding from Resto's gloves in the dressing room just before the fight.

Resto administered a severe beating to Collins in their fight on June 16, 1983, an undercard bout to the Roberto Duran-Davey Moore fight. Collins suffered permanent damage to his right eye, cuts, bruises and facial swelling. Collins, of Nashville, had to quit the ring and was killed in an auto accident last March.

The New York State Athletic Commission conducted its own investigation into the incident shortly after it happened and banned Lewis for life as a manager in this state. It also banned a second in Resto's corner, Pedro Alvarado, for life. Alvarado was not indicted. Resto's boxing license was suspended.

A pretrial hearing is scheduled for next Wednesday. If convicted, Resto and Lewis face up to 15 years on the first-degree assault charge and up to 7 on the second-degree assault.