



CRAIG R. HAMILTON

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LETTER OF OPINION:

ITEM: Muhammad Ali W.B.C. Championship Belt

I, Craig Hamilton of JO Sports, Inc. certify that the championship belt described herein is, in my opinion, an original championship belt awarded to Muhammad Ali in 1976 by the World Boxing Council (WBC) for his victory over George Foreman in 1974.

HISTORY:

Muhammad Ali fought George Foreman on October 30, 1974 in Kinshasa, Zaire. Given little chance, Ali knocked Foreman out in the 8th round to win the World Heavyweight Title for the second time. Ali employed a "rope-a dope" strategy of covering up on the ropes and letting Foreman hit him until he tired. The strategy worked as an exhausted Foreman could not rise after being hit in the 8th round. With this victory Muhammad Ali was recognized as the linear, undisputed heavyweight champion. He was recognized by Ring Magazine, the World Boxing Association (WBA) and World Boxing Council (WBC), the ruling bodies in boxing at that time.

HISTORY OF THE WORLD BOXING COUNCIL (WBC) & THE GREEN BELT:

The World Boxing Council is currently one of four major sanctioning bodies in professional boxing alongside the IBF, WBA, and WBO. Owing to the many high profile bouts sanctioned by the WBC and the legendary fighters recognized as champion by the WBC, the organization continues in importance to this day. The WBC was founded by eleven countries on February 14, 1963 in Mexico. Today it has 161 member countries. Jose Sulaiman was elected President of the organization in late 1975 and continued in that role



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until his death in 2014. Sulaiman initiated many changes within the WBC including their practice of awarding championship belts. Prior to 1976 the WBC gave out championship belts, but not with any regularity. Research shows that George Foreman was awarded a black belt by the WBC, but not many champions were. In 1976 the WBC began the practice of giving out its championship green belt. This green leather belt was manufactured in France and designed by Huguerin. It was sponsored by adidas and their name was featured on the center plate. This green belt was only produced between 1976 and 1978 and research shows that less than twenty champions received it. Champions who received this belt included Muhammad Ali, Roberto Duran, Alexis Arguello, Carlos Monzon, Ken Norton, Hugo Corro and Ken Norton. The WBC continued to give out championship belts from 1978 going forward, but the design changed.

MUHAMMAD ALI'S WBC BELT:

Muhammad Ali was recognized as the world heavyweight champion by the WBC upon his victory over George Foreman on October 30, 1974. Research indicates Muhammad Ali did not receive a championship belt from the WBC until sometime in 1976. My research has uncovered a video of Muhammad Ali wearing his WBC green championship belt following his victory over Richard Dunn on May 24, 1976 in Munich, Germany. So it is established Ali received his green WBC championship belt some time prior to that fight. The belt worn by Muhammad Ali is green leather. It has a large oval, gold color center plate and is flanked by two smaller plates on either side. The center plates includes a human figure draped in flags with the continents of the world on either side. The large center plate includes the verbiage, *WORLD CHAMPION W.B.C. adidas*. The smaller plates include a wreath at the perimeter and a green floral design at center. The name of Muhammad Ali does not appear on the belt. Unique features on this belt include the gold lines on the perimeter and that the belt closes on the fighter's side, not the back.

WBC BELT FROM JOEL PLATT COLLECTION:

This belt is green leather. It has a center plate with two small medallion plates to the right and left not connected by metallic chains. It has a clasp on the right. The belt closes on the side, not the back. The verbiage on the belt center plate is, *WORLD CHAMPION W.B.C. adidas*. The smaller plate medallions have a wreath around the perimeter with a green floral design at center. The length of the belt is approximately 41 inches. The width at the widest point is 8 inches and at the



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smallest point 3.5 inches. There are six eyelets. There are gold lines on the front perimeter. The belt does show evidence that it has been worn as evidenced at the eyelets. There is no fighter name on the belt. The belt has been twice signed by the father of Muhammad Ali, Cassius Clay, Sr. He has added the inscription, "Championship Belt Won By My Son Muhammad Ali." Joel Platt purchased this belt directly from Cassius Clay, Sr. Mr. Platt still has the cancelled check he issued for payment. He also has a letter from Muhammad Ali dating to 1994 acknowledging the belt as his.

DREW "BUNDINI" BROWN & THE WBC BELT:

Drew "Bundini" Brown was an assistant trainer and corner man for Muhammad Ali. He joined Ali in 1963 and stayed with him throughout the remainder of his career. Brown retained many items worn by and awarded to Muhammad Ali during his career. Brown kept many of these in storage lockers in Uplands, California. Brown died on September 24, 1987. The contents of his lockers were sold the following year. Items Brown had kept in these lockers included fight worn equipment used by Muhammad Ali, fight posters of Ali, photographs of Ali, corner man equipment used by Brown and in one locker, the WBC championship belt now presented to Heritage Auctions for sale.

LINEAGE OF WBC BELT PRESENTED TO HERITAGE AUCTIONS FOR SALE:

Drew "Bundini" Brown maintained storage lockers in Upland, California. The WBC belt presented to Heritage Auctions for sale was in one of those storage lockers. When Brown died on September 24, 1987 his lockers went unpaid. They were sold by Sartain Co. Auctioneers of Ventura, California on April 17, 1988. The purchaser of the locker with this WBC belt was Jay Denham, presently of Surprise, Arizona. Mr. Denham was interviewed at 4:00 PM (EST) on July 8, 2016. Mr. Denham confirmed he bought only one of the Drew "Bundini" Brown lockers and that inside the locker along with some fight equipment, posters and photographs was the WBC belt. Mr. Denham supplied a letter to that effect. Mr. Denham retained the WBC belt until selling it Troy Kinunen of Wisconsin in late 2007 or early 2008. Troy Kinunen consigned the WBC belt to Heritage Auctions for sale in 2016.

INVESTIGATION & ANALYSIS:

It is not uncommon for ranking organizations like the WBC to award more than one belt to a champion as important as Muhammad Ali. My investigation first centered on the World Boxing Council and their history of awarding belts. I had employed Grant Phillips, a person with a long association with the WBC, a person



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with a long friendship with Jose Sulaiman, a person with access to the WBC files and a person with great knowledge of the belts awarded over the years by the WBC. It has been determined that following Muhammad Ali's victory over George Foreman the first belt awarded by the WBC was the green belt produced between 1976 and 1978. There is no indication Muhammad Ali received any other belt between 1974 and 1976 from the WBC. The belt in question matches favorably with the belt worn by Muhammad Ali following his fight with Richard Dunn in 1976 as does the one possessed initially by Bundini Brown. The belts were also compared to the belt of Carlos Monzon, who received one at approximately the same time. The belts are nearly identical except for size (length). My investigation reveals that Drew "Bundini" Brown had possession of this belt until his death. Brown also kept important artifacts of Muhammad Ali including the robes he wore in his first fight and third fights with Joe Frazier, numerous fight worn trunks and gloves and a large quantity of training equipment used by Ali. These items were also sold in the 1988 locker sale. Following his death the WBC belt was purchased by Jay Denham. Mr. Denham has supplied a letter to that effect. The belt itself has been examined and is a WBC belt produced between 1976 and 1978. For size the belt has been tried on by people with waist sizes consistent with that of Muhammad Ali in 1976. The result was the belt would fit a person of Muhammad Ali's waist size. The Platt belt was in possession of the father of Muhammad Ali until he sold it to Mr. Platt. This belt is the same size and style as the Bundini Brown belt.

CONCLUSION:

It is reasonable to conclude that Drew "Bundini" Brown had possession of Muhammad Ali's WBC green championship belt. Brown had a large cache of Muhammad Ali items in his storage lockers and to date all have proved to be authentic. The belt's lineage can be traced from Ali to Brown, to Brown's locker, to Jay Denham, and to Troy Kinunen. The belt was produced in the correct time period. The belt matches the belt worn by Muhammad Ali in the 1976 fight video and the belt is the correct size.

It is also reasonable to conclude that the belt in possession of Joel Platt and previously owned by Cassius Clay, Sr. is an authentic belt issued to Muhammad Ali around 1976. It is the proper size and style for the era.

It is my opinion that the signatures on the WBC belt in question are those of Cassius Clay, Sr., father of Muhammad Ali. It is my opinion that the signature on



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the 1994 letter referencing the belt in question is that of former world heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali.

It is my conclusion that the belt in question is an original World Boxing Council (WBC) championship belt awarded to Muhammad Ali following his victory over George Foreman on October 30, 1974.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig Hamilton", is written over a horizontal line.

Craig Hamilton
President-JO Sports, Inc.

August 17, 2020

Date