

# Railways derails boxers' SBL dreams

Neeraj Goyat and Co could be reprimanded for taking part in pro-boxing league as the RSPB cranks up pressure

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PROFESSIONAL BOXERS Neeraj Goyat, Amandeep Singh and Kuldeep Singh could be barred from competing at the Nationals after taking part in the Super Boxing League (SBL) without acquiring the requisite permission from their employers Railways Sports Promotion Board (RSPB).

On July 6, RSPB had issued a letter to the general secretaries of the zonal units and sports associations affiliated with it informing that the board has not approved the request of No-Objection Certificate from its boxers for participation in the league.

"It doesn't make any sense because we are not even fighting under amateur rules. This league is independent of the BFI. We have fought on the professional circuit so I don't know why these problems are being created this time," said Neeraj, who is captaining the Haryana Warriors in the ongoing SBL. Former Commonwealth Games bronze medallist Amandeep is leading the Punjab Sultans while multiple-time national champion Kuldeep captains Bahubali Boxers.

"Last year too, we applied for an NOC for our professional fights and got it in a couple of days. This time, we had sent the application almost 20 days in advance but it was declined at the last moment," said Kuldeep. "Also, we only got to know about the letter as it was being circulated through WhatsApp the evening before the league's opening. We never actually saw the letter physically."

## No NOC from board

RSPB secretary Rekha Yadav said that while the board has always allowed its sportspersons to take part in professional events, the situation was different because BFI — which has refused to allow its boxers to take part in the league run by promoter Bill Dosanjh and British boxer Amir Khan — can put an embargo on Railways boxers' participation at the National Games.

"I am least concerned if they recognise this competition or not. Historically, from cricket to kabaddi, we have not just allowed our players to take part in competitions but have encouraged them to do so. The more they play the better. However, BFI has hinted that it will not allow the boxers to play in the nationals, which will impact my team's per-



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RSPB SECRETARY

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BFI officials were unavailable to comment. Indian Air Force boxer Deepak Tanwar, who is captaining the Maratha Yodhas franchise, said "my board gave me a go-ahead to compete in the SBL, provided I ap-

plied for leave."

"Even Vijender Singh has a job with Haryana Police. Everybody should want their boxers to succeed. If you really want to promote the sport in India, that is," Tanwar said. While Neeraj, Amandeep and Kuldeep decided to go ahead and take part in the league, other Railways boxers including Sunny Dayal and Deepak Sharma pulled out after the letter was issued.

"It's all because of the scare tactics being used. Only a handful of amateurs play at the Commonwealth Games and end with a job and money from the Centre and state governments," said Kuldeep. "Fighting at Nationals, no boxer will get such TV coverage, audience or money as is the case with the SBL. That's why, so many young boxers were excited to come here and take part."

"Kisi wajah se professional boxers ko desh-drohi ki tarah dekha ja raha hai," said Neeraj,

who will defend his WBC Asia-Pacific welterweight title on August 5 on the card headlined by Vijender Singh.

"How are we doing anything wrong when even the world body AIBA has said that a professional boxer can compete in amateur events. I represented my country and nearly qualified for the Rio Olympics as a professional boxer."

The 25-year-old took part in AIBA's Olympic qualifiers in Venezuela last year but fell one win short of booking a Rio berth.

"If I had qualified, people wouldn't have been so afraid of professional boxing and perhaps would have promoted it. Manny Pacquiao can be an Member of Parliament without having fought in amateur boxing, and we are being treated like second-grade citizens. We are boxers, trying to fight another professional boxing match. Hum ye toh nahi bol rahe ki bhai ab hum kushti karege."