

The IPF's Pursuit of Monopoly: Rule 14.9 and Beyond

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Part 2: Lift IPF or Lift Nowhere

Monopoly is a grant of special privilege by the State, reserving a certain area of production to one particular individual or group. Entry into the field is prohibited to others, and this prohibition is enforced by the gendarmes of the State.

-Murray Rothbard, *Man, Economy and State*

a) Consolidation in South Africa

In 2001, WPC Worlds was held in Cape Town, South Africa, a five-day event with hundreds of lifters. The WPC affiliate in South Africa had approximately 800 members across the country's nine provinces. The week before the meet, WPC-South Africa officials were summoned to a meeting with South Africa's Minister of Sport, Ngconde Balfour. A participant in that meeting recalls:

We had no idea as to what was to be discussed, as we were not given the courtesy of an agenda. When we arrived at the Department of Sport's conference room, there were representatives from Home Affairs, Internal Affairs, Police, Drug Squad, and a few others from the powers that be that I did not know. In the center of this gathering was Alan Ferguson, the IPF representative for South Africa.

Balfour stated that Ferguson had informed him about the WPC championships and gave the following ultimatum:

The minister threatened to surround the hotel with the army and stop the event if we did not agree to test. We had no option but to agree. We had to supply at our cost a room at the hotel for the drug testing crew.

Despite the WPC subsidizing the government to impose drug testing, in 2002 the government made the IPF affiliate the only authorized powerlifting organization in South Africa, shutting down the WPC affiliate and barring entry of other federations. (So much for the South African Bill of Rights' affirmation that "Everyone has the right to freedom of association.") Along these lines, the IPF affiliate's constitution states under its intents and purposes:

To proclaim as unauthorised all Powerlifting Meetings and Competitions throughout South Africa, which are not held under the Rules and Regulations of the FEDERATION, whether such contemplated, controlled or held by any club or association.
(http://www.powerliftingsa.co.za/sites/default/files/constitution_0.pdf)

Alan Ferguson, now a member of the IPF's Executive Committee, claims that the government contacted him about the WPC championships and gave him the power to allow or forbid the competition. Ferguson states that he decided to allow the competition on the condition of drug testing: "The competition duly took place and the South African Drug Testing officials arrived to do the testing and although I was not present I was informed that they were chased out of the building."

Participants at the meet recall events differently. "Alan Ferguson was indeed there," states Nance Avigliano, who competed on the American team. Another member of the American team remarks

concerning who was chased out when the drug testers arrived:

It was the lifters who ran out of the building in an attempt to avoid the testing group since the WPC is not a tested organization. When word was received that the Testing Officials were on site, there was an emergency exit in the back of the warm-up room that had an exit to the outside. That was the route the lifters used to evacuate the facility. It looked like a circus with the lifters running around the Holiday Inn and the testing officials chasing after them.

Moreover, Ferguson describes the aftermath of the competition in disingenuous terms: “After this competition the SAPA [the WPC affiliate] closed down and finally complete unity took place which is the current situation in the country.” The SAPA did not close down; the government *closed it down*. As for “unity,” this suggests choice and persuasion, such as lifters from several federations choosing to compete at the Raw Unity Meet after feeling persuaded of the competition's quality. By contrast, powerlifting in South Africa is in a state of IPF monopoly where persuasion and choice do not exist.

b) A Historical Note on South Africa and the Raw Unity Meet

As it happens, South Africa also figured in a notable lawsuit against the IPF in 1985. Following problems at 1982 IPF Masters Worlds, Ernie Frantz established the AMPF (American Masters Powerlifting Federation). “The time had come to end the reign of the IPF,” recounts AMPF co-founder Maris Sternberg, who won a silver medal at 1983 IPF Women's Worlds. She recalls:

During this time, many lifters (not just Masters), realized that the USPF/IPF was really not interested in the welfare of the athletes; just the preservation of their power. And so the AMPF became the APF. In 1984, South Africa approached Ernie to allow them to lift against us in the USA. At that time, South Africa was banned by the IPF because of apartheid. Ernie decided to de-politicize the sport and invited the South Africans to lift in a meet on September 16, 1984. Immediately, controversy started. The IPF threatened dire results.

Punitive action followed at Men's Worlds in 1984:

They decided to ban us all from IPF competition for lifting outside the USPF...At a closed door meeting to be held in November 1984 at Men's Worlds in Austin, TX, the plan was to deal with our disloyalty. We were never informed of this meeting. We were never given the opportunity to defend ourselves.

Frantz and Sternberg took action in 1985:

We ended up serving court papers to the USPF and IPF officials at Men's Senior Nationals in June 1985 in Chicago...There were a number of charges, including restriction of trade and violation of civil rights. That began a program of lies, threats and accusations by the IPF that almost became a joke. Eventually, we wound up in court. The IPF lost by default on all counts including my part of the case. We sued under the Clayton Act which simply stated that you can't ban an amateur athlete from competing any place they choose. We were awarded a judgment of \$115,000 total, \$13,000 of it mine. Obviously we never collected. It did insure that the IPF could not hold any functions in the US. (Sternberg's recollections can be found at <http://www.chicagopowerlifting.com/MarisInterview.html>.)

Thus, the current hostility against the Raw Unity Meet reenacts long-standing attitudes in the IPF.

c) Monopoly and More Beyond South Africa

In 2006, veteran powerlifting chronicler Paul Kelso wrote regarding the 2002 imposition of IPF monopoly in South Africa:

Many countries have government sports ministries or departments, and they usually recognize no sports bodies that are not IOC/GAISF [General Assembly of International Sports Federations], and give no financial support to the unconnected. I fear—or predict—that sometime in the future non-tested events in Europe or elsewhere will come to the attention of the local Ministries and run afoul of the local rules and be squelched. Maybe even start a ripple effect. (<http://www.powerliftingwatch.com/node/1070>)

In this vein, the constitution of the IPF affiliate in Trinidad-Tobago mirrors the South African affiliate's in describing all non-IPF competitions as “unauthorized.” The Trinidad-Tobago affiliate likewise has a monopoly over the sport. (See pages 2 and 4 at http://www.powerliftingtt.org/files/TTPF_Constitution_Revised.pdf.) Germane to that region, USAPL president Larry Maile remarked about NAPF activities in 2008:

Over the past two years the General Secretary, Mr. Robert Keller, Vice President Nestor Gregory, and/or I have met with the Ministers of Sport of several of our nations, highlighting the need to participate at the IPF level and encouraging these nations to fund powerlifting. (See page 23 at http://www.powerlifting-ipf.com/fileadmin/data/Congress/Minutes_2008.pdf).

“Fund powerlifting” likely means “fund IPF affiliates.” Such objectives boil down to transfers of wealth from taxpayers to an athletic organization, or what might be called sport welfare. This demonstrates what economists term rent-seeking behavior, defined by Dr. Mark Thornton as “a search for privilege and personal gain through the political process.” Thus, the IPF has the dubious distinction of being the world's largest rent-seeking organization in the powerlifting world, in addition to its monopolistic aggression against competition in at least two countries.

Rent-seeking behavior also sheds light on the IPF's pursuit of recognition by the International Olympic Committee. Consider then IPF Secretary General Detlev Albrings' comment at the 2007 IPF Congress: “I am convinced that to reach the IOC-recognition is a big goal for you and the IPF. It is for you the possibility to get more support from your National Olympic Committees and Government.” (See page six at http://www.powerlifting-ipf.com/fileadmin/data/Congress/Minutes_Congress_2007.pdf). Interestingly, when the IPF released its Strategic Plan for 2008 to 2011 that same year, it spoke of having “limited financial strength.”

IOC recognition and the perceived likelihood of more government subsidies also gives context to the IPF's major changes to the weight classes at the 2010 General Assembly. As a previous proposal to change the classes in 2007 stated, “Powerlifting has more classes than any other bodyweight sport & this will not be acceptable if we seek to enter major Games, present our Champions to governments, the public, etc.” (See page 34 at http://www.powerlifting-ipf.com/fileadmin/data/Congress/Minutes_Congress_2007.pdf.)

By this thinking, with less weight classes the IOC will be more inclined to recognize powerlifting; and with that recognition will come increased “support” by governments. Thus, three decades of tradition and continuity in the sport have been discarded in the pursuit of greater taxpayer transfers from governments to the IPF. In the event of greater subsidies for the IPF, further repression can be expected against what the IPF calls “outlaw federations” and “non-compliant Powerlifting groups.”