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SWITCHING SIDES

HE'S GOT THE MOUTH

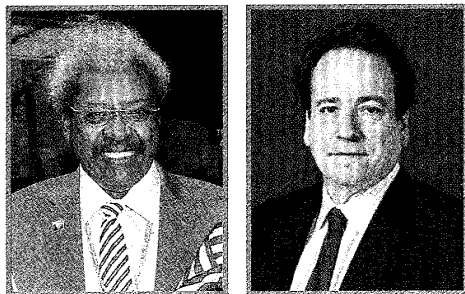
Judd Burstein used to sue boxing promoter Don King. Now they're in the same corner.

ONCE UPON A TIME, Judd Burstein represented fighters in one case after another against boxing promoter Don King. He was so good at it—costing King \$35 million in settlements—that King recently hired Burstein to work for Florida-based Don King Productions, Inc. Now the 52-year-old lawyer represents the promoter in any litigation matters that come up.

Their latest brawl involves heavyweight champion Hasim “The Rock” Rahman, whom King promoted for four years before Rahman declared bankruptcy and switched to another promoter in 2005. Working with local counsel in Las Vegas, Burstein has sued Rahman for breach of contract. In October he expects to go head-to-head with Rahman’s lawyers in bankruptcy court in Nevada.

The issue is how much Rah-

man earned due to King’s efforts—which is, according to Burstein, every penny. “Don got Rahman to number one,” Burstein says. “He resurrected his career.” He says he will go after every asset Rahman has, in-



DON KING (LEFT) AND HIS LAWYER
JUDD BURSTEIN

cluding the house he bought for his mother.

King’s suit asks for \$2 million—plus, but Burstein says the total request has yet to be determined. Rahman’s lawyer, Richard Holley of Las Vegas-based Santoro, Driggs, Waleh, Kearney, Johnson & Thompson, did not

return calls for comment.

Burstein’s New York firm, the aptly named Judd Burstein, specializes in sports law and litigation. Like the brawlers he represents, he is confident and fit, but he doesn’t work the bags himself: “My best punch is my mouth.”

After starting as a defender of alleged mobsters, he came to boxing in 1997, when he represented fighter Terry Norris in a contract dispute with King. He bagged Norris a \$7.5 million settlement, then filed contract disputes against King for seven years, during which time he says he pocketed \$4 million. And the bloodletting didn’t end there. King once referred to Burstein as an “insidious insect,” while Burstein called King a “cancer” on the sport.

The turning point came in 2004, when Burstein represented fighter Chris Byrd in a contract dispute against King. Burstein

won a \$2.5 million settlement, he recalls, but his client failed to pay his legal fees. That put Burstein and King on the same side, suing Byrd together. Burstein also represented King in a dispute with boxer Bernard Hopkins, which settled in 2005. (The flip-flop was first reported in *The Wall Street Journal*.)

King says he decided on Burstein because he just couldn’t beat him in the courthouse. “I’m an admirer of his work,” King says. “He was excellent. If I can get that same type of service, I’ll take it.”

Burstein says he decided to put down the gloves after consulting with colleagues and friends. “As long as I know that what I’m doing is ethical,” he says, “then I’m doing what I’m supposed to.”

King, 74, says he’s forgiven Burstein: “When you are in battle, you say things. He wants to win, by any means necessary. If you want a model of virtue, go someplace else. I’m in it to win it.”

—JOSHUA LIPTON