

INTERNATIONAL BOXING FEDERATION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Springfield, NJ – March 23, 2026 – The International Boxing Federation (IBF), having granted sanction on March 5, 2026, withdrew sanction for the March 8 bout between Champion Jai Opeteia and #15 ranked contender Brandon Glanton on March 6 after the pre-fight press conference held at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The bout sanction followed discussions that began on February 11, when IBF President Daryl Peoples, after learning about the scheduled contest on social media, reminded Opeteia’s representatives of **IBF Rule 5** governing champions and unification bouts. Michael Francis, head of Tasman Fighters, Opeteia’s promoter of record with the IBF, followed with an application requesting sanction for the optional defense of the IBF Cruiserweight title. The IBF denied sanction of the bout pursuant to **IBF Rule 5.E.2**, which states: **“For the purpose of unification of titles, the preeminent Champions of the World Boxing Association (‘WBA’), the World Boxing Council (‘WBC’), and the World Boxing Organization (‘WBO’) may be designated as ‘elite contenders’ and may be permitted to fight for the unified title.”**

Francis then requested that the committee reconsider its decision, noting that the bout would not be for unification, but the Zuffa title would be contested alongside the IBF title in the same manner that the International Boxing Organization (IBO) title has been contested in bouts involving IBF champions. Peoples explained that the IBF recognizes the IBO and added that like the other sanctioning organizations operating in U.S. professional boxing, it is subject to the same federal regulatory framework governing sanctioning bodies. Sanction remained denied.

Discussions then resumed with Joshua Dubin, Esq., an attorney who advised that he had been retained to represent Opeteia, and Sean Gibbons of Manny Pacquiao Promotions (MP) and Knucklehead Boxing. Per Gibbons, he was asked to serve as a mediator at the request of Harrison Whitman, who works alongside top TKO executives. In an email dated February 28, 2026, Mr. Gibbons wrote “Any prior requests related to this bout were unauthorized and should be disregarded.” The IBF had no further discussions with Michael Francis. All further communications were between Gibbons and Dubin. On March 1, 2026, the IBF received a request from Gibbons for sanction of the Opeteia vs. Glanton bout for the IBF Cruiserweight title under the promotion of MP.

On March 3, 2026, the IBF received a letter from Dubin on behalf of Opeteia confirming that “Zuffa Boxing ... will not bill or otherwise promote the bout as a ‘unification.’” The letter further stated that “[a]ny belt awarded will be characterized as a trophy or token of recognition.” Gibbons

also represented to President Peoples that the Zuffa title would not be contested. The IBF sanctioned the bout subject to these conditions.

Despite these representations, it was made clear at the March 6 press conference in Las Vegas that the Opetaiia vs. Glanton bout would be for the “Zuffa World Cruiserweight Championship.” The IBF notified Gibbons that sanction had been withdrawn for Opetaiia vs. Glanton following the press conference. As a result, the bout was an Unsanctioned Contest under **IBF Rule 5.H**, which provides that: **“An Unsanctioned Contest is a fight which the IBF has not formally approved for sanction or where sanction has been formally withdrawn. If a Champion participates in an unsanctioned contest within his prescribed weight limit, the title will be declared vacant whether the Champion wins or loses the bout.”** Sanction fees paid to the IBF by Gibbons on March 6 were returned on March 7.

On March 19, 2026, the IBF Board of Directors met via teleconference to address the status of the IBF Cruiserweight title held by Jai Opetaiia. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Board voted to vacate the title pursuant to **Rule 5.H**. The IBF Cruiserweight title is vacant.

The IBF wishes Jai Opetaiia continued success in his career. He rose through the IBF rankings to become World Champion, one of the highest achievements in a fighter’s career. As noted in an earlier press release regarding this situation, the IBF’s rules don’t always yield the preferred or popular outcome, but they provide structure and transparency, serving not just the champion but also those waiting for the opportunity to fight for the title.

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