

Champ's court no-show may cost crown

By DEVLIN BARRETT

World heavyweight boxing champ Lennox Lewis might have lost his legal bout with Don King by not showing up to testify, a federal judge hinted yesterday.

Manhattan federal Judge Lewis Kaplan chided Lewis' lawyers several times in the final round in court over the British boxer's broken agreement to fight a World Boxing Association contender after defeating Evander Holyfield last year.

Lewis says he should not have to fight the confeder because the WBA has

given him permission to duke it out with someone else, while King's lawyers argue he's broken the deal and must forfeit the WBA crown.

Lewis is suing to keep the title and remain the undisputed world champion.

After the three-day trial, Kaplan showed little patience for Lewis' lawyers in court yesterday.

"The inference to be drawn from the fact that you didn't call Mr. Lewis" to the stand suggested Lewis' advisers had coaxed him into breaking the deal, the judge said.

Kaplan also accused the

champ of using the courts as a ruse to try to hold onto the belt — and the extra money it could mean for future title fights — for as long as possible.

"The litigation was a stall," said Kaplan — a charge Lewis lawyer Scott Gelfand vehemently denied.

Lewis is scheduled to fight Michael Grant in Madison Square Garden on April 29. If the judge rules against him, that fight will be for only two of the three heavyweight belts.

"Lennox Lewis wants to go into that fight with the titles not divided among

minor pretenders," said Patrick English, one of Lewis' lawyers.

After listening to the arguments, King strode out of court yesterday beaming and praising the court system.

"I just think this is a great country," King said when asked about his expectations for the verdict.

"You got to be able to work for America to eradicate its injustice," said the bombastic boxing boss.

"As Kennedy would say, we're standing on a new frontier," he said. "Whether they rule positive or negative, it's still a victory for this country."