

2018/01: Should boxing be banned?

What they said...

'It is unacceptable anywhere else in life to try and belt someone in the head, and yet we have tens of thousands of people glued to TV screens to see who can get hurt the most'

Dr Michael Gannon, President of the Australian Medical Association

'I cannot get out of my mind the last words Scott spoke to me: Boxing is about taking risks and I will take them'

Sporting commentator Bob Westerdale, referring to the recent death of British light-heavyweight Scott Westgarth

The issue at a glance

On February 27, 2018, British brain injury charity, Headway, called for boxing to be banned following the death of British light-heavyweight boxer Scott Westgarth. [↗](#)

Westgarth died on February 25, 2018, after winning a light-heavyweight bout in Doncaster, England, on a points decision.

Headway noted that this was the third boxing death in Britain since 2013 and that this direct loss of life did not take account of the head injuries that inevitably result from what the organisation termed 'this so-called sport'.

The World Medical Association and the British Medical Association have both consistently called for boxing to be banned. [↗](#)

On July 3, 2017, Michael Morgan, professor of cerebrovascular neurosurgery at Macquarie University, called for boxing to be banned in Australia in the wake of the Jeff Horn-Manny Pacquiao contest staged in Brisbane on July 2. Morgan argued that the potentially permanent brain injuries sustained by both fighters made the continuation of the sport unacceptable. [↗](#)

The move to ban boxing in Australia was first reignited in March, 2015, after the death of Queensland professional boxer, Braydon Smith, who collapsed 90 minutes after completing a featherweight bout and did not regain consciousness. The Australian Medical Association has long stated its opposition to boxing and other combat sports. [↗](#)

However, boxing associations, exponents and fans of the sport worldwide have defended boxing, arguing that it is no more dangerous than many other sporting competitions. [↗](#)

Background

The information contained below is an abbreviation of the Wikipedia entry titled 'Boxing'

The full entry can be accessed at [↗](#)

Boxing is a combat sport in which two people, usually wearing protective gloves, throw punches at each other for a predetermined set of time in a boxing ring.

The Marquess of Queensberry rules have been the general rules governing modern boxing since their publication in 1867.

A boxing match typically consists of a determined number of three-minute rounds, a total of up to 9 to 12 rounds. A minute is typically spent between each round with the fighters in their assigned corners receiving advice and attention from their coach and staff. The fight is controlled by a referee who works within the ring to judge and control the conduct of the fighters, rule on their ability to fight safely, count knocked-down fighters, and rule on fouls.

Up to three judges are typically present at ringside to score the bout and assign points to the boxers, based on punches and elbows that connect, defence, knockdowns, hugging and other, more subjective, measures. Because of the open-ended style of boxing judging, many fights have controversial results, in which one or both fighters believe they have been "robbed" or unfairly

denied a victory. Each fighter has an assigned corner of the ring, where his or her coach, as well as one or more "seconds" may administer to the fighter at the beginning of the fight and between rounds. Each boxer enters into the ring from their assigned corners at the beginning of each round and must cease fighting and return to their corner at the signalled end of each round.

A bout in which the predetermined number of rounds passes is decided by the judges, and is said to "go the distance". The fighter with the higher score at the end of the fight is ruled the winner. With three judges, unanimous and split decisions are possible, as are draws. A boxer may win the bout before a decision is reached through a knock-out; such bouts are said to have ended "inside the distance". If a fighter is knocked down during the fight, determined by whether the boxer touches the canvas floor of the ring with any part of their body other than the feet as a result of the opponent's punch and not a slip, as determined by the referee, the referee begins counting until the fighter returns to his or her feet and can continue. Some jurisdictions require the referee to count to eight regardless of if the fighter gets up before.

Should the referee count to ten, then the knocked-down boxer is ruled "knocked out" (whether unconscious or not) and the other boxer is ruled the winner by knockout (KO). A "technical knock-out" (TKO) is possible as well, and is ruled by the referee, fight doctor, or a fighter's corner if a fighter is unable to safely continue to fight, based upon injuries or being judged unable to effectively defend themselves. Many jurisdictions and sanctioning agencies also have a "three-knockdown rule", in which three knockdowns in a given round result in a TKO. A TKO is considered a knockout in a fighter's record. A "standing eight" count rule may also be in effect. This gives the referee the right to step in and administer a count of eight to a fighter that he or she feels may be in danger, even if no knockdown has taken place. After counting the referee will observe the fighter, and decide if he or she is fit to continue. For scoring purposes, a standing eight count is treated as a knockdown.

Ingemar Johansson of Sweden KO's heavyweight champion Floyd Patterson, 26 June 1959. In general, boxers are prohibited from hitting below the belt, holding, tripping, pushing, biting, or spitting. The boxer's shorts are raised so the opponent is not allowed to hit to the groin area with intent to cause pain or injury. Failure to abide by the former may result in a foul. They also are prohibited from kicking, head-butting, or hitting with any part of the arm other than the knuckles of a closed fist (including hitting with the elbow, shoulder or forearm, as well as with open gloves, the wrist, the inside, back or side of the hand). They are prohibited as well from hitting the back, back of the head or neck (called a "rabbit-punch") or the kidneys. They are prohibited from holding the ropes for support when punching, holding an opponent while punching, or ducking below the belt of their opponent (dropping below the waist of your opponent, no matter the distance between). If a "clinch" - a defensive move in which a boxer wraps his or her opponents arms and holds on to create a pause - is broken by the referee, each fighter must take a full step back before punching again (alternatively, the referee may direct the fighters to "punch out" of the clinch). When a boxer is knocked down, the other boxer must immediately cease fighting and move to the furthest neutral corner of the ring until the referee has either ruled a knockout or called for the fight to continue.

Medical concerns

Knocking a person unconscious or even causing a concussion may cause permanent brain damage. There is no clear division between the force required to knock a person out and the force likely to kill a person. From 1980 to 2007, more than 200 amateur boxers, professional boxers and Toughman fighters died due to ring or training injuries. In 1983, editorials in the Journal of the American Medical Association called for a ban on boxing. The editor, Dr. George Lundberg, called boxing an "obscenity" that "should not be sanctioned by any civilized society." Since then, the British, Canadian and Australian Medical Associations have called for bans on boxing. Supporters of the ban state that boxing is the only sport where hurting the other athlete is the goal. Dr. Bill O'Neill, boxing spokesman for the British Medical Association, has supported the BMA's proposed ban on boxing: "It is the only sport where the intention is to inflict serious injury on your opponent, and we feel that we must have a total ban on boxing." Opponents respond that

such a position is misguided opinion, stating that amateur boxing is scored solely according to total connecting blows with no award for "injury". They observe that many skilled professional boxers have had rewarding careers without inflicting injury on opponents by accumulating scoring blows and avoiding punches winning rounds scored 10-9 by the 10-point must system, and they note that there are many other sports where concussions are much more prevalent.

In 2007, one study of amateur boxers showed that protective headgear did not prevent brain damage, and another found that amateur boxers faced a high risk of brain damage. The Gothenburg study analysed temporary levels of neurofilament light in cerebral spinal fluid which they conclude is evidence of damage, even though the levels soon subside. More comprehensive studies of neurological function on larger samples performed by Johns Hopkins University and accident rates analysed by National Safety Council show amateur boxing is a comparatively safe sport.[citation needed]

In 1997, the American Association of Professional Ringside Physicians was established to create medical protocols through research and education to prevent injuries in boxing.

Professional boxing is forbidden in Iceland, Iran, Saudi Arabia and North Korea. It was banned in Sweden until 2007 when the ban was lifted but strict restrictions, including four three-minute rounds for fights, were imposed. It was banned in Albania from 1965 till the fall of Communism in 1991; it is now legal there. Norway legalized professional boxing in December 2014.

Internet information

On March 5, 2018, Chronicle Live published a comment by Craig Johns titled 'Banning boxing is not the right way to honour proud fighting man Scott Westgarth's legacy'

The comment argues that boxing is a highly skilled sport, generally loved by those who participate in it and should not be banned.

The full text can be accessed at [↗](#)

On March 5, 2018, The Star published a report by Bob Westerdale titled 'How boxing is picking up the pieces after the tragedy of Sheffield boxer Scott Westgarth'

The report interviews a fight promoter on what should happen in the wake of Scott Westgarth's death.

The full text can be accessed at [↗](#)

On March 3, 2018, The Daily Star published a comment by Chris McKenna titled 'Boxing needs to invest millions on fighters' safety after Scott Westgarth's tragic death'

McKenna called for more research and the immediate implementation of a range of safety measures to reduce the likelihood of further deaths.

The full text can be accessed at [↗](#)

On February 28, 2018, The Sydney Morning Herald published a report titled 'Calls for boxing to be banned after death'

The report details calls by the brain injury charity Headway and others that boxing be banned in the wake of the death of British light-heavyweight boxer Scott Westgarth.

The full report can be accessed at [↗](#)

On February 27, 2018, the British brain injury charity Headway issued a media release calling for boxing to be banned following the death of light-heavyweight boxer, Scott Westgarth, the day after a fight.

The charity argues that boxing is simply too dangerous and that a sport whose 'ultimate aim' is to cause harm should not be tolerated.

The full text of this release can be accessed at [↗](#)

On February 27, 2018, The Guardian published a comment by Kevin Mitchell titled 'Boxers know the risks and their bravery is in continuing to take them' in which he argued that boxers continue to

want to fight despite the risks.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On February 26, 2018, The Independent published a comment by Steve Bunce titled ' RIP Scott Westgarth: The latest anonymous sacrifice in a sport naïve to the simple truths behind its own horror'

Bunce argues for boxing to be banned as too dangerous to continue.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On February 2, 2018, The Financial Review published an opinion piece by Declan Ryan titled 'Boxing: life and death in the ring of honesty'

The opinion piece examines the appeal of the sport and the degree of economic coercion sometimes involved. It concludes overall it is not worth the risks taken.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

In October, 2017, the World Medical Association (WMA) reissued its position statement opposing boxing. Its opposition was first stated in 1983. The WMA's position statement on boxing states, 'Boxing is a dangerous sport. Unlike other sports, its basic intent is to produce bodily harm by specifically targeting the head.'

The full document can be accessed at ' [🔗](#)

On August 27, 2017, the president of the Australian Medical Association (AMA), Michael Gannon, was interviewed on Radio 2GB by Reverend Bill Crews. Gannon stated his own and his Association's strong opposition to the continuation of boxing.

The full text of the interview was posted the following day on the AMA's Internet site.

It can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On August 13, 2017, the ABC published a report titled 'Down for the count: Can Australian boxing return to its former glory?'

The article treats the boost to Australian boxing anticipated as a result of Jeff Horn's recent world title win.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

AmCham, a body representing international business interests throughout Australia and the United States, has produced a flier titled 'The Economic Impact of Hosting Major Sporting Events - Impact, Legacy and Opportunity'

The document highlights the advantages that have resulted from hosting major boxing competitions.

The full text can be found at [🔗](#)

On July 3, 2017, The Sydney Morning Herald published an opinion piece by Michael Morgan, professor of cerebrovascular neurosurgery at Macquarie University following the Jeff Horn-Manny Pacquiao contest. Professor Morgan argued that the injuries sustained by both fighters were further reason to ban boxing.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On April 9, 2017, the Queensland Government issued a media statement titled 'Brisbane to host historic World Title Boxing bout'

The statement outlines the benefits the Government believed would accrued to the state of Queensland from hosting the Jeff Horn-Manny Pacquiao world welterweight contest.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On August 5, 2016, The Daily Mail published an article titled 'How running is more risky than

boxing or rugby: Sports that are perceived as dangerous actually have fewer injuries' which reported on research findings that indicated that many popular physical activities were more hazardous than boxing.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

Healthfully has published an informative piece titled 'What Are the Safety Rules of Boxing?' The article outlines the safety measures required by the World Boxing Foundation. The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

On March 20, 2015, The Conversation published an opinion by James F. Donnelly, Lecturer in Psychology, School of Health and Human Sciences, Southern Cross University, titled 'Should Boxing Be Banned?'

Dr Donnelly argues against banning the sport, though he acknowledges that the risks it poses could be better managed. The full text can be found at [🔗](#)

On September 4, 2012, the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) published a report titled 'Trends in sport and active recreation injuries resulting in major trauma or death in adults in Victoria, Australia, 2001-2007' which demonstrated that boxing was not among the most dangerous sports in the state.

The full text can be accessed at [🔗](#)

Arguments in favour of banning boxing

1. Boxing is an especially dangerous activity as its intent is to cause injury

Opponents of boxing argue that boxing is especially dangerous because, unlike most other contact sports or high-risk physical activities where participants may be injured as a collateral consequence of their involvement, in boxing the deliberate intention of competitors is to cause injury.

The British brain injury charity Headway has stated, ' In this sport, the ultimate aim is to deliberately cause head and brain injuries by rendering your opponent senseless by repeated blows to the head delivered with great force. The obvious, natural and unavoidable consequence of this is brain injury, which can be fatal.' [🔗](#)

The same position has been put by the World Medical Association(WMA) which stated its opposition to boxing as long ago as 1983 and restated it as recently as October, 2017. The WMA's position statement on boxing states, 'Boxing is a dangerous sport. Unlike other sports, its basic intent is to produce bodily harm by specifically targeting the head.' [🔗](#)

The WMA further stated, 'Despite regulation of boxing in various countries, injuries and death still occur as a result of boxing related head trauma, indicating that regulation does not provide adequate protection to participants.' The WMA summarised its position by stating, 'The WMA believes that boxing is qualitatively different from other sports because of the injuries it causes and that it should be banned.' [🔗](#)

Three members of the British Medical Association (BMA). Doctors Shaun Rudd, James Hodge and Rachael Finley, stated their opposition even more directly in a comment published in the BMA's journal on January 27, 2016. The three stated, 'It is time we recognise boxing as little more than state-condoned assault that should be banned immediately.' [🔗](#)

The Australian Medical Association is similarly opposed to boxing because of the fundamentally assaultive nature of the activity. On August 27, 2017, the AMA's president, Dr Michael Gannon, stated, 'The whole point of this pastime is to disable your opponent so that they can no longer continue by inflicting on them an acute brain injury, better known as concussion.' Dr Gannon further stated, 'It is unacceptable anywhere else in life to try and belt someone in the head, and yet we have tens of thousands of people glued to TV screens to see who can get hurt the most... I was at Subiaco Oval in Perth this afternoon watching the last ever AFL game there - plenty of physical bravery on display, plenty of skill, plenty of application. Some hard hits, some blood spilt, but I can tell you the reason they're out there is not because they're trying to harm their fellow

combatant. When it comes to boxing and the other so-called combat sports, that's the point - to cause a brain injury to your opponent. You know, I would like to think that in my lifetime we would see the end to this so-called sport.' [↗](#)

2. Boxing inflicts long-term brain injury as well as immediate harm

Opponents of boxing further note that repeated blows to the head result in chronic as well as short-term injury. They argue that boxers face risks other than death and immediate bodily trauma such as broken facial bones and contusions. They also face the long-term consequences of repeated brain injury.

In relation to both the short- and long-term injury that boxing causes, the World Medical Association states, 'The main medical argument against boxing is the risk of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), also known as chronic traumatic brain injury (CTBI), and dementia pugilistica or "punch-drunk" syndrome. Other injuries caused by boxing can lead to loss of sight, loss of hearing, and fractures. Studies show that boxing is associated with devastating short-term injuries and chronic neurological damage on the participants in the long term.' [↗](#)

John Hardy, the chair of Molecular Biology of Neurological Disease at University College London's Institute of Neurology has explained the disease process in simple terms. He states, 'You get tiny lesions along the blood vessels where they have torn the nerve cells around them. This damages those nerve cells, and those cells start to develop the tangles that you see in Alzheimer's disease...

A lot of boxers, and indeed American footballers too, have a period in their 30s and 40s where they are depressed, they drink, they show explosive tempers, and have basically pretty messed up lives...It's not inherent in their personalities as boxers, it's damage to the frontal cortex. They are already experiencing brain injury.' [↗](#)

Dr Michael Gannon, the president of the Australian Medical Association, has made the same point with regard to chronic brain injury caused by boxing. Dr Gannon has stated, 'It's no surprise that with repetitive brain injury you sometimes see consequences, and we see that all the time in terms of Parkinsonism, dementia, and other forms of chronic brain injury.' [↗](#)

In 2000, the National Center for Biotechnological Information published a paper by BD Jordan, of the Brain Injury Program, Burke Rehabilitation Hospital, White Plains, New York. Jordan stated, 'Chronic traumatic brain injury (CTBI) associated with boxing occurs in approximately 20% of professional boxers. Risk factors associated with CTBI include increased exposure (i.e., duration of career, age of retirement, total number of bouts), poor performance [and] increased sparring... Clinically, boxers exhibiting CTBI will present with varying degrees of motor, cognitive, and/or behavioural impairments. The severe form of CTBI is referred to as dementia pugilistica... Pathologically, CTBI shares many characteristics with Alzheimer's disease...'

Jordan concluded by noting that the most effective means of combating this disease was not to treat symptoms but to prevent it occurring. He stated, 'The mainstay of treatment of CTBI is prevention.' [↗](#)

As an indication of the trauma and progressive injury resulting from boxing, critics of boxing have noted that on March 26, 2016, Audley Harrison, the 2000 Olympic super-heavyweight champion, announced he was about to retire permanently as a boxer after revealing that a series of punishing blows to the head during his 38-fight professional career had left him with brain injuries, sight problems and severe mood swings. [↗](#)

3. Boxing exploits the relatively under-privileged

Opponents of boxing argue that it has a particular appeal for the young and underprivileged and is often promoted as a means of getting them off the streets and providing them with discipline and opportunity. However, critics note, those drawn to boxing because of their social disadvantage cannot be said to be exercising a free choice when they take up the sport.

This argument was outlined by Robert L Simon in his book 'The Ethics of Sport' published by Oxford University Press in 2016. Simon notes, 'Many would argue that most fighters come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and are drawn to professional boxing because it offers

them what might be the only opportunity to lift themselves out of poverty and even gain great wealth.' [↗](#)

In an article published in the Financial Review on February 2, 2018, Declan Ryan stated, 'Boxing is peopled largely by those drawn from poverty, for whom fighting is one of very few routes out of hardships so pervasive they have passed into cliché.' [↗](#)

Ryan focuses on Bernard Hopkins, who competed from 1988 to 2016, fought at the highest level into his fifties and describes himself as 'a slave who learned to read'. Hopkins is quoted saying, 'It's still who can buy the slave with the most money...' [↗](#)

It has been argued that even for many of those who do not become professional boxers their adherence to the sport is not a choice as it is a consequence of not having other choices. Lucia Trimbur's book, 'Come Out Swinging' published in 2013 by Princeton University Press claims that those who frequent Gleason's Gym in New York (the centre of the book's study) are 'largely black and Hispanic boxers of colour. For these men, deprived of almost any prospect of work by the destruction of manufacturing industry and living with the continuous threat of jail, boxing becomes their occupation, "work without wages"'. [↗](#)

4. Boxing promotes a dangerous ideal of masculinity

It has been claimed that boxing is a cultural anomaly as at a time when societies worldwide are trying to recast violent images of masculinity, boxing seems to glorify this stereotype.

In an opinion piece published on July 4, 2017, by Channel Nine, in the aftermath of Jeff Horn's victory over Manny Pacquiao, Jo Abi stated, 'While the athleticism of the sport can be respected to a degree, it's the scenes of adoring child fans surrounding Horn over the past couple of days that are disturbing.

We're raising a generation of children who view boxers as heroes, and that is the problem that lingers long after the wounds of the boxing elite have healed.' [↗](#)

Commentators such as Abi are concerned that the promotion of high-profile boxing competitions and indeed the existence of the sport itself links and legitimises violence and masculinity, especially among the young. Abi concludes her piece, '[Parents] should be less comfortable with the God-like status of boxing champions in the eyes of Australian youth.' [↗](#)

Michael Gannon, the president of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) has stated, 'It's not an unreasonable leap to make to say that it[boxing] normalises this [violence]. I will not encourage my children to resolve any conflicts they have at school and beyond with the use of violence. It's not tolerated in any other place in society. We've seen, to a large extent, our football codes cleaned up. It is unacceptable anywhere else in life to try and belt someone in the head, and yet we have tens of thousands of people glued to TV screens to see who can get hurt the most.' [↗](#)

Michael Gannon has also condemned the step beyond admiring boxers, which sees young people take up the sport themselves. Gannon has stated, 'So you're often taking kids off the street, to use that aphorism that's popular, and I think the fitness, the application, the training, they are all positives, but the inevitable thing is that if you start a nine year old or a 12 year old or even a 15 year old sparring, they will look up to the people elsewhere in the gym and somewhere along the line someone will suggest that they take it to the next level. And of course, the next level is to punch someone in the head. You can't do it anywhere else in polite society. It's something that appeals to the base instincts of a minority of the population and it's a form of brutality.' [↗](#)

Critics argue that popularising boxing has the capacity to extend the use of violence into other areas in society. As part of a August 2017 interview with AMA president Michael Gannon, Reverend Bill Crew noted, 'So what concerns me is that it normalises violence. We've seen all these drunken king hits and fights on the news.' [↗](#)

The inevitable inter-connection between aggression, violence and masculinity promoted by boxing (even given the existence of female boxing competitions) has been the subject of numerous psychological studies. In a review completed by Carolyn Smit in 2009 at the University of Cape Town, Smit claimed, 'The distinctly male-dominated sport of boxing endorses and promotes refereed violence and controlled aggression through its norms and regulations. Aggression, violence, and masculinity form complexly intertwined features prominent in boxing.' [↗](#)

5. Boxing is declining in popularity and is replaceable

Opponents of boxing argue that its continued legality cannot be justified by its popularity among fans as, despite periodic large attendances and TV viewing audiences, it is becoming increasingly a niche sport without the widespread popularity it once enjoyed.

Boxing has suffered a decline in attendances worldwide for any but the most publicised high-level bouts. It has been claimed that in the United States this decline is a consequence of competition from other sports and the over-promotion of middle-order events.

In an opinion piece and analysis published in *The American Spectator* on December 12, 2016, it was noted 'Television first helped re-interest fans in [the] sport.... But over-exposure on television led to the proliferation of sanctioning agencies and new weight classes so that there are more champions now than even dedicated fight fans can keep up with. Television can put on any number of "title fights" now. But the titles have about been emptied of meaning.' [↗](#)

A report in *The New York Times* published on August 8, 2015, gives a similar picture. 'News media attention tends to be scarce. Major bouts, such as they are, are consigned to pay-per-view showings. Once in a while, a fighter comes along to stir excitement...but that's the exception. The professional ranks today are mired in a bewildering array of weight divisions...and an alphabet soup of multiple sanctioning organisations.' [↗](#)

Opponents of the sport argue, whatever its lingering niche appeal, if boxing were banned popular interest would simply be redirected to one of the many other sporting competitions with which boxing currently vies for spectator attention.

Arguments against banning boxing

1. Other sports are more dangerous than boxing

It has been claimed that boxing suffers unjust discrimination because of the apparently inherent violence of the sport. Its defenders note that boxing actually involves less risk than a number of other popular sports.

Boxing's defenders note that fatalities relative to the number of participants are actually lower in boxing than they are in many other sports. A 2012 study conducted in Victoria found that a range of other sports were more likely to result in injury and death. The report concluded, 'The rate of major trauma inclusive of deaths, due to participation in sport and active recreation has increased over recent years, in Victoria, Australia. Much of this increase can be attributed to cycling, off-road motor sports, Australian football and to a lesser extent swimming.' [↗](#)

Drawing on this study, a comment published in *The Conversation* on March 20, 2015, noted, '[M]otor sports, fishing, equestrian activities and swimming all led to more deaths in a year than boxing, which didn't even make it into the top ten.' [↗](#) A study conducted fifteen years earlier in 2000 found that 'motor vehicle accidents and falls were far more likely to kill people than boxing or any other sport.' [↗](#)

Regarding the situation in Britain, a report published in *The Daily Mail* on August 5, 2016, stated, 'Research released by health and wellbeing provider Benenden found football was the sport most likely to cause injuries, followed by running, rugby, cycling and swimming.

This was despite the public's perception that boxing, rugby, horse riding, martial arts and weightlifting were the most injury-prone sports.' [↗](#)

The injustice of popular perceptions has been noted by those who claim that when fatalities occur in other sports this usually does not lead to calls for a ban.

James F. Donnelly, lecturer in Psychology, School of Health and Human Sciences, Southern Cross University and the author of the March 20, 2015, opinion piece published in *The Conversation* noted, '[T]he death of a young NSW rugby player, Jake Kedzlier, after being struck in the face by a player's knee led to statements about having weight classes for leagues and it being a "freak accident", as though injuries were not inherent in that contact sport.' [↗](#)

The skewed perceptions critics have noted by Craig Johns in an opinion piece published in *Chronicle Live* following Scott Westgarth's death. Johns stated, 'Sadly, the nature of the sport means that injuries, and sometimes even death, is a possibility.'

But the reality is that's the case in any sport. Footballers have died on the pitch. How many of us have embraced the Winter Olympics this month? Can anyone tell me some of the sports they do are less dangerous than boxing? The figures will tell you they're not. Boxing is very low down on the list of sports that cause serious injury/death.' [🔗](#)

2. Boxers willingly enter the sport knowing the risk

Supporters of boxing argue it is a sport in which the risks are known and that those who enter the sport willingly take them on. They argue that those who would ban the sport have no right to override the wishes of those who are knowingly and consciously participating in an activity they enjoy despite the dangers involved.

Following the recent death of British light-heavyweight Scott Westgarth, sporting commentator Bob Westerdale, who knew Westgarth well, wrote, 'I cannot get out of my mind the last words Scott spoke to me: Boxing is about taking risks and I will take them.' [🔗](#)

A similar claim has been made by Craig Johns in an opinion piece published in Chronicle Live on March 5, 2018, in which Johns states, ' Unfortunately, as is often the case in these circumstances, [Scott Westgarth's] death has been used as means to attack the sport and call for it to be banned. To do so is wrong, and certainly not something Scott himself would want. He loved the sport and, just as his father had done before him, dedicated his life to it.

His final interview just moments before collapsing in his dressing room is telling...[Scott stated,]"I'll box anyone. I just enjoy it. I do it for fun, not because I think I'm going to be a world-class fighter. I just do it purely for entertainment and I'm glad we can put on a show and keep everybody entertained."

Johns concluded his opinion piece claiming, ' All boxer's know the risks, and they all choose to participate in the sport.' [🔗](#)

A similar attachment to the sport of boxing has been expressed by many fighters. English boxer Matty Mainwaring has stated, 'I'm not an aggressive person. I just love the sport.' Mainwaring's coach, Kieran Farrell, who quit fighting after a boxing-induced brain injury, has stated, 'I got to age 18 and turned professional and when I was doing that there was nothing else that I ever thought of.

I worked for my dad tarmacking, but that was just to get a few quid to get taxi money to get to the gym. There was nothing else, ever...' [🔗](#)

Some boxers have also claimed that in common with other sports involving a degree of personal risk, the adrenaline surge is part of boxing's appeal.

Luke Jackson, captain of the Australian 2012 Olympic boxing team, has stated, 'It's an alpha-male kind of thing. They want to race cars, that's a very dangerous thing, they want to surf huge waves, that's a very dangerous thing...' [🔗](#)

3. Boxing is closely regulated and boxers are medically supervised

The World Boxing Federation has established rules to provide boxers with the greatest likelihood of avoiding serious injury or death.

Boxers should have regular physical exams by a doctor approved by his or her local boxing commission. The boxer, or contestant, must have the results of his or her physical exam available at each contest, proving he or she is in good health for the contest.

The boxer needs to wear the proper gear for the fight. Headgear (allowed in amateur competitions only) is usually multi-layered and gel-lined, and it covers the head, ears, cheeks and often the chin. A mouthguard will protect the boxer's teeth, while handwraps will help protect his or her hands by acting as an added buffer against impact for the bones and skin.

Male boxers should wear protective cups, while female boxers should wear breast protectors.

The ringside physician is present and able to enter the ring between rounds to assess the boxers' health and safety. The physician can inform the referee his or her findings and recommendations about either opponent.

Opponents are determined according to their weight, age and experience. These criteria help to assure the safety of the boxers so they are not overmatched by their opponents.

As in any sport, the boxer should train and condition properly. Boxing requires endurance, speed, strength, agility and balance training. All of these elements can help to keep a boxer safe in the ring.

Referees also have the power to stop a bout anytime they feel a boxer is overmatched--before the boxer gets hurt or knocked down. Others who can stop the match include the ringside doctor, either boxer or the event holder. [↗](#)

Victorian boxing regulations specifically state that the medical practitioner is responsible for supplying an auriscope and ophthalmoscope, airway support equipment, oxy-viva mask and oxygen. A spinal board is provided by the promoter. Pre and post contest examination forms are provided by the Board.

Before the commencement of a contest the medical practitioner and the referee must agree on a clear, pre-determined means, whether by bell, hammer, prescribed hand signal or another method, by which the medical practitioner can indicate the need for or desirability of a medical examination of a contestant during the contest; and stop the fight.

The medical practitioner must sit ringside in a position adjacent to the stairs to allow prompt access to the ring; that allows effective communication with the referee; and that ensures that they have an unobstructed view of the combatants at all time during a contest, including between rounds. [↗](#)

4. Boxing is a popular sport which attracts large crowds

Supporters of boxing argue that its continuing popularity provides no justification for the sport to be banned. Boxing remains a very popular sport with huge numbers of fans in many countries around the world.

In the United States, despite a decline in spectators since boxing's peak between the 1920s and 1960s, the sport still attracts a very large following. A Forbes report published on May 7, 2015, noted the continuing popularity of the sport. The Manny Pacquiao-Floyd Mayweather fight drew a record number of Pay-Per-View customers. Early estimates gave the figure at more than 4 million with a record \$72 million taken at the gate.

An April 25, 2015, fight between Wladimir Klitschko and Bryant Jennings brought 17,000 fans to Madison Square Garden, while drawing 1.7 million viewers for HBO. A February 21, 2015, fight between Gennady Golovkin and Martin Murray, also on HBO, drew 1.4 million viewers on prime time replay. An earlier bout between Golovkin and Marco Antonio Rubio took in 1.3 million subscriptions, the second-most watched non-Pay-Per-View event of 2014. While boxing on NBC is bringing in upwards of 3.4 million viewers during peak viewership.

The author of the Forbes report, Robert Tuchman, concluded, 'Consumers do still care about boxing on a fairly tangible level. The sport is not going anywhere...' [↗](#)

An ESPN report published on September 9, 2016, noted boxing's continuing popularity in England. The author of the article, Dan Rafael, noted, 'Arenas across the country sell out regularly thanks to legions of passionate fans that support their hometown fighters.' [↗](#)

Television viewership figures are robust on Sky Sports, the all-sports subscription network that has made boxing a major part of its schedule. BoxNation, an all-boxing subscription channel founded by Hall of Fame promoter Frank Warren shows significant fights from within the United Kingdom, the United States and around the world.

The popularity of the sport in Britain is being fed by the success of its fighters. In September, 2016, fourteen reigning world titleholders were from the United Kingdom., including the heavyweight champion Tyson Fury. That is the most of any country in the world and the most the United Kingdom. has ever had at one time. [↗](#)

In Australia, while boxing spectator numbers may not be growing at the rate occurring in the United States or Great Britain, participation is increasing dramatically. A news report published in December, 2012, stated that Australian Bureau of Statistics figures on participation in sport and recreation show participation in boxing has increased by 131 per cent since 2005. Ted Tanner, chairperson for Boxing Australia, said they had noticed more people taking part in tournaments or just getting involved in boxing training regimes for fitness reasons.



5. The boxing industry is a significant contributor to economic growth

It has been claimed that the boxing industry is a major promoter of economic growth in those countries where the sport flourishes. Large, audience-attracting events have been claimed to be of particular economic benefit.

In April 2017, prior to the Jeff Horn-Manny Pacquiao world welterweight championship bout, Queensland premier Anastacia Palaszczuk stated, 'The match is a highlight on the state's major event calendar and is set to deliver an expected \$15.8 million economic boost to the city.' The Minister for Tourism and Major Events, Kate Jones, claimed that securing the World Boxing Organisation (WBO) Welterweight World Title Fight was a major coup for Brisbane and the local tourism industry. Ms Jones stated, 'This blockbuster event will raise Queensland's profile in many of our key international tourism markets including the United States, United Kingdom, New Zealand, China and South East Asia... Our message to visitors is come to Brisbane and enjoy the best of what the city has to offer and take this opportunity to stay on to experience a Queensland holiday.'

Brisbane Lord Mayor Graham Quirk has further stated, 'Major events like this contribute more than \$100 million to Brisbane's growing economy every year, and together with our wider tourism industry supports 64,700 local jobs.'

AmCham, a body representing international business interests, throughout Australia and the United States, has stressed the economic advantages to states and nations of hosting major professional sporting contests including boxing. They have referred to the impact of the Jeff Horn-Manny Pacquiao boxing contest, the first international boxing match held in Queensland. According to AmCham's figures published after the fight, it brought in \$23 million to the Queensland economy and 17,000 out of state visitors.

AmCham has stated, 'Hosting sporting events creates business opportunities across trade, investment, education and tourism.'

Further implications

Concerns about boxing seem to range from the symbolic, that is the sport's apparent endorsement of violence, to the immediately physical, that is the risk of injury and death that boxers face.

In terms of risk of death it would appear that boxing is no more dangerous than a range of other sports which are not campaigned against in the same way. The question of long-term brain injury caused by repeated head trauma is more difficult to address. The risk is indisputable and United States research published in 2000 has indicated that one in five professional boxers suffers from chronic traumatic brain injury (CTBI) associated with boxing.

However, the risk is not confined to professional boxers as other studies have suggested that amateur boxers also face significant likelihood of developing chronic brain injury. In addition, similar findings have been made regarding the hazards faced by those playing soccer and American football.

The question then becomes whether state intervention, up to and including banning the sport is justified.

Boxing's defenders argue that it is a matter of free choice and that so long as competitors are aware of the risks they are facing then it is up to them to decide if they wish to begin or continue with the sport. Others claim that many boxers begin the sport when young, at a time when they are not able to assess the risks, while others are led by economic compulsion to take it up.

The extent to which economic pressure invalidates a free choice has been debated. Some argue that because someone comes from an underprivileged background, that does not mean he or she is incapable of assessing the risks involved in taking up a sport such as boxing. It has also been noted that the class differentiations that once meant that a majority of those taking up boxing came from a disadvantaged background no longer apply. Boxing has become a popular get-fit exercise regime for many among the wealthy middle classes around the world. It is no longer the

preserve purely of the less-well-off, though most of those who use boxing purely for exercise do not box combatively. 

There is also the concern that if boxing were banned the sport would simply be driven underground where it would continue unregulated and therefore be likely to cause greater harm to competitors.  Additionally, Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), a new form of combative sport which has become very popular and is making inroads into boxing's fan base, is likely to gain further support if boxing were banned. The verdict is apparently still out on which is safer boxing or MMA. .

Some opponents of boxing argue that what is required is reform of the sport rather than its abolition. Among the suggestions that have been made are fewer rounds, banning of blows to the head and to give the supervising doctor the power to call a halt to a fight mid-round. 