

Senator Smith: Thank you.

● (2020)

SPORT

REGULATION OF BOXING

Hon. Andrew Thompson: Honourable senators, I have a question for the Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport. It concerns the recent tragic death of a young Korean boxer, Duk Koo Kim. My interest in this stems from my years as an amateur boxer in the navy.

Would the minister tell us if he is considering examining the procedures and regulations governing boxing so that it becomes a sport and not a hazard to the lives of participants?

Hon. Raymond J. Perrault (Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport): Honourable senators I thank the honourable senator for his question.

The problem of violence in boxing, which, over the years, has led to the deaths of certain participants in the sport, is a matter of real concern to me and the department. I have held meetings—

Hon. Jacques Flynn (Leader of the Opposition): Is there something other than violence in boxing?

Senator Perrault:—during the past month with respect to proposals from various parts of the country to reduce or, hopefully, to prevent ring deaths and injuries. These submissions have led me to the belief that if negotiations can move forward successfully, we should have in Canada a co-ordinator of boxing to ensure that those who step into rings in any province of Canada are physically able to participate in pugilistic contests.

Unfortunately, certain provinces do not have provincial boxing commissions. Ideally, it would be helpful to have commissions located in all of the provinces. Perhaps we require a central information clearing agency—and this surely cannot be beyond the bounds of technology today—a computer-assisted agency to provide computer access to dossiers on all participants to those commissions to ensure, for example, those boxers who have suffered brain damage, those who have been rendered senseless or who have received significant injuries do not participate in boxing contests within a few days of sustaining such injuries and receive competent medical clearances before they fight again.

I must say that some of those provinces where boxing matches are staged on a regular basis have shown a high degree of co-operation in efforts to assure reasonable standards for the sport. There is less interest in certain other provinces where boxing matches are not held on a large scale.

After recent events in the United States, it would be very tragic were someone to die in a boxing ring this week in Canada. In my view, we must move quickly to do what we can to ensure that we do not have a repeat, ever again, of the recent ring tragedy that occurred in the United States.

I am making the problem one of my priorities as the Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport.

Hon. Joseph-Phillippe Guay: It is common knowledge that one can step into the ring and be physically fit in all respects. You can have a commission to ensure that boxers are physically fit before they go into the ring, but after being hit in the second round the injury may not be noticed until the seventh or eighth round. That is the problem facing boxers today.

Senator Perrault: The honourable senator has made a good point. There has been a suggestion that pre-fight brain scans should be made mandatory to ensure that there are no people physically incapable of participating in boxing matches.

Of course, regardless of precautions, there are no fail-safe measures, and we all understand that. A number of hockey and football injuries, some serious, still occur despite the fact that equipment has been dramatically improved over the years. But perhaps we can minimize sports risks, and I feel that we should attempt to do so.

As far as a central co-ordinator of boxing is concerned, I am not thinking in terms of some super-czar located in Ottawa or Toronto who will dictate what should be done in all of the provinces, but rather a person and an office to assist the provincial boxing commissions with information regarding ring records, physical and medical records. We want the maximum degree of protection for people engaged in the sport of boxing.

Hon. C. William Doody: I have a supplementary question for the minister. Could the honourable minister tell us whether boxing is one of the so-called sports that his department will continue to fund and encourage, or is it one of those less desirable types of athletic competition in terms of human destruction and injury?

● (2025)

Senator Perrault: It is our view that boxing can be a safer sport under the proper conditions—for example, if proper headgear is used; if the weight of gloves is such that fists are not going to cause serious physical injury; and if the competence of the referees is such that contests will not proceed beyond a point where serious physical injury is possible.

Assisted by the federal government, Halifax has one of the best boxing training programs in Canada. Indeed, honourable senators, the maritimes can be very proud of the standard established in Halifax for the production of good, competent amateur boxers. Almost all of the abuses that are taking place are in the so-called professional ranks. I have reports of situations in certain parts of Canada where teams of three or four boxers, some of whom should not even be participating in the sport, are moving from town to town and nobody knows their records. One of these boxers could be knocked out two or three times a month. He might participate in a bout, in order to earn \$50, having been knocked out a couple of nights before in another small town. That kind of abuse is the beginning of tragedy. The good amateur program centred in the great city of Halifax has been a marked success.

Senator Doody: I should like to repeat the question. Would the minister indicate whether or not his department will continue to fund this so-called sport which encourages young people to get into this sort of life?