

Is boxing down for the count?

by Mark Alberstat

On December 12, 1981, Muhammad Ali announced that he was retiring from boxing, saying "I don't want to be one of them old fighters with a flat nose saying duh-duh-duh before a fight." Ali is not saying duh-duh-duh yet but he is unfortunately well on his way to being punch-drunk.

Many of the boxing writers, promoters, trainers, and the boxers themselves, realize that there is such a thing as being punch-drunk, but either minimize its effects or totally disregard it as a factor to the boxer.

Punch-drunkness usually happens to the kind of boxer who concentrates more on slugging than "finesse." These slugging boxers are normally inferior to the other type, take more head punishment and traditionally have shorter careers.

Early symptoms of being punch-drunk are unsteadiness in the walk, a slight faltering or slurring of the speech, and sometimes short mental confusion. Advanced indications could be staggered walking, backward swaying, body tremors, and a definite slurring of speech.

Ali, known as the Louisiana Lip for his eloquence in interviews and his daunting and well known

poems, is now notably slurring his words. In 1980 he gave a radio interview on the BBC. The interview was never aired because his speech was so slurred that listeners would not have been able to understand what he was saying. Although he is punch-drunk, and will be more so in the future, he can consider himself lucky that he didn't die in the ring as some have.

In the fall of 1981 Korean boxer Duk Koo Kim died as the direct result of a fight. This prompted renewed criticism of the sport and new ideas for reform.

When boxers do die in the ring they die from either a hit or hits to the head or a hard fall to the canvas. When they are hit in this fashion the brain will sometimes break the blood vessels that surround it. The result is a hematoma, a massive build-up of blood between the hard skull and the soft brain. The blood build-up puts more and more pressure on the brain until death occurs. Although deaths in boxing are rare, injuries are all too common.

The number of fights has a direct effect on the amount of injury done to a boxer's brain. If young boxers didn't fight unnecessary matches they would

greatly reduce their chances of having brain damage later on in their careers, and possibly have longer careers.

Another serious problem boxers must contend with is cerebral atrophy, or damaged parts of the brain that are not replaced. One investigation found that more than half of the boxers studied had some form of cerebral atrophy.

The tissue loss usually occurs deep in the middle of the brain and in the back of the head in the cerebellum. These parts of the brain regulate muscle coordination and balance. A person with damage here may also slur their speech.

In 1960 a middleweight from the University of Wisconsin, Charlie Mohr, died of a hematoma while defending his NCAA crown, despite the fact that he was wearing protective headgear. This resulted in the banning of intercollegiate boxing.

Reform in boxing is clearly needed, but no matter how much of it is implemented, some deaths will occur. The only way to prevent deaths in boxing is to ban the sport altogether, which would only relegate boxing to the back alleys and could increase the injury and fatality rate.



In 1962 a report in the **Journal of the American Medical Association** called for the upgrading of safety standards and better medical examinations in boxing. The article also went on to make the insane suggestion that there should be "less padding in the gloves so that the threat of damage to the hands will inhibit the power of the blows." At that time, as is the case today, eight ounce gloves were used compared with six ounce gloves used earlier in this century. The six ounce gloves did reduce hand injuries but also allowed the boxers to hit each other harder

in the head, with more effect.

The U.S. Congress looked into creating a federal boxing commission that would put forward national standards for all pro fights. Each boxer would also undergo stringent medical testing for a fight and would have a "passport" of his medical record from past bouts.

Until reforms are implemented, boxers will continue to suffer unnecessary injuries. One good point that should be raised is that thumbless gloves are now starting to be used to prevent eye injuries.

Athletes of the week



WOMEN: Karen Maessen, a fifth-year player for the women's volleyball Tigers, is this week's female Athlete of the Week.

Maessen was named a tournament all-star at the women's CIAU volleyball championships this past weekend.

The former AUAA MVP and Dal Tigers MVP was the on-court leader for the female Tigers this weekend.

A Halifax native, Maessen is working towards an MSC in Kinesiology. She is a member of Canada's National Women's Volleyball team.

MEN: Bernie Derible, a spiker on the men's volleyball team, is this week's male Athlete of the Week.

Derible led the volleyball Tigers to fourth place in the CIAU championships held at Laval University this past weekend, recording 58 kills, seven blocks and two service aces in CIAU tournament action.

A Dartmouth native, Derible has now received four Athlete of

the Week selections, as well as one honourable mention, in the course of this season.



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CIAU finals feature clinic

As part of the CIAU men's basketball finals, Dalhousie University and Coca Cola Limited will stage a free players' clinic for children 8-14 years March 16 at the Dalplex.

Dalhousie and Coca Cola will provide a CIAU t-shirt and ticket to the championship game to all participants.

The event will run from 9 a.m. until noon.

Head clinician will be Tiger basketball coach and assistant National Team coach Doc Ryan. Ryan will be assisted by a number of Tiger players.

Enrolment is limited to 100 and is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

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