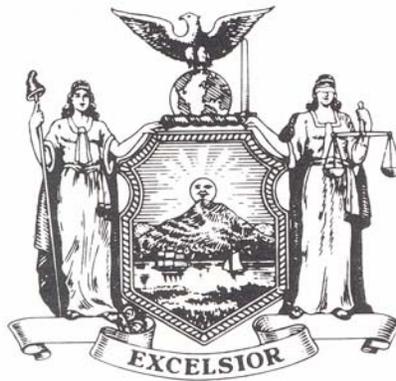


**NEW YORK STATE
ATHLETIC COMMISSION**



**Testimony of
Chairman Ron Scott Stevens
Before the
Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade
and Consumer Protection**

March 3, 2005

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On behalf of the State of New York and Governor George Pataki, I'd like to thank Chairman Cliff Stearns and the Members of the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection for inviting me to speak on the subject of reform and federal oversight of the sport of professional boxing.

Boxing is being glamorized today on reality television shows and in the movies. But there are no Clint Eastwoods or Sylvester Stallones in the time-worn gyms that populate poor neighborhoods where young boxers dream the dream. Their chances of succeeding, of becoming a contender no less a champion, face enormous odds. Nevertheless, their numbers are great. Just look at the crop of Golden Gloves entries each year. The New York Golden Gloves had 660 entries this year, up from 600 a year ago, with most hoping one day to turn pro. So many who dream. Some are skilled, some are not so skilled. Ladies and gentlemen, boxing is, figuratively speaking, a risky, bare-knuckled sport. That is why those of us who are charged with regulating it have no room for error because we are dealing with life and death during every three-minute round.

For the past 25 years, I've covered the waterfront when it comes to professional boxing, primarily as a matchmaker and promoter. Based on that vast experience, Governor Pataki appointed me as Chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission on June 10, 2003. I have learned much over that period of time and I would like to take this opportunity to share some of my observations with you.

A federal bill to protect the general welfare of boxers and to ensure nationwide fairness in the sport of professional boxing is a noble idea whose time has come. But if I may, please allow me to repeat the words of the former three-time heavyweight champion Muhammad Ali who said on September 9, 2004, before this same committee, “There is nothing wrong with boxing that we cannot fix.” I would like to add that there are, at present, many competent and hard-working commissions, both big and small, who should be given a voice in this process.

Firstly, I would advocate minimum national standards for medical exams. However, nothing should prohibit any state from enforcing local standards that exceed the minimum requirements. In New York, for example, a boxer must pass several medical exams before he or she is permitted to box such as an MRI, an ophthalmologic exam, an EKG, a full physical exam and a blood screening for HIV, Hepatitis B and C. A final pre-fight mini-physical is also performed at the venue prior to the bout. Only Nevada has a similar standard. It should be noted that states like New Jersey and Connecticut substitute CAT Scans for MRIs which conform to the Association of Boxing Commission’s medical recommendations. Conversely, to my knowledge, twelve states only require pre-fight physicals and nothing else. This often leads to forum shopping by boxers and their handlers who avoid well regulated jurisdictions knowing their boxers might not pass the medical exams previously mentioned. This could possibly compromise the boxers’ health and safety.

If medical records can be centrally controlled, maintained and disseminated, a powerful tool will have been created which could minimize the risk of injury to boxers. Most importantly, this will dramatically reduce the chances of a boxer developing pugilistic dementia, also known as “punch-drunk” syndrome.

Secondly, in the name of fair play, rules and regulations must not deviate from state-to-state. Since rules do not deviate in other major sports then why should they in boxing? Questions often arise amongst licensees such as, “Is there a mandatory eight count in New York? Is there a standing eight count in California? Is there a three knockdown rule in Nevada? Can a boxer be saved by the bell in Texas?” Uniform rules must be adopted and enforced.

Thirdly, I’d like to address the issue of the business of boxing. But that discussion would take a lifetime. Therefore, let me just say for now that all licensees, whether they be boxers, promoters, managers, trainers, seconds or matchmakers are entitled to have their rights enforced without them having to go to civil court to address perceived wrongs.

There are a number of ways boxing licensees can be protected from the heavy burden of legal fees and the time considerations of litigation. An effective form of arbitration and mediation, as well as standardized contracts, should be provided as they are in other major professional sports. Also, it should be noted that New York has the discretion to recognize and enforce out-of-state findings by way of comity. I would recommend that comity be mandatory nationwide.

Fourthly, a national commission must try to find a way to create a pension fund for boxers and the other licensees who make boxing their full-time profession. Athletes in other professional sports are so protected as are managers, coaches, scouts and umpires. It can be done and it must be done, in some way and in some form.

Fifthly, with all due respect to the Committee, I think there is another organizational structure that should be considered. I agree with the concept of three commissioners but unlike the current model, I strongly urge that there should be a full-time chairman or commissioner. In New York, for example, the commission consists of three members who are appointed by the Governor with the Governor designating one of the members as a full-time Chairman. All are appointed for terms of three years. Under the New York State statute, the Chairman can direct the administrative functions of the commission and still maintain his or her full policy authority as a commissioner. In essence, the Chairman in New York combines your bill's executive director's responsibilities with that of a full-time commissioner. This gives the other two commissioners an inside look at the day-to-day operations of the commission when voting on a potentially critical issue. It also creates an environment for well-informed and decisive action.

Let me conclude by saying that dialogue about creating a national boxing commission has been going on for some time with boxing's rank and file debating this issue for just as long. Therefore, in the best interests of the sport, I believe this issue should be finally resolved. The status quo inadvertently casts a shadow over many state commissions by

implying inadequate oversight. That often is not the case and I am sure that this is not what was ever intended.

Again, I would like to thank Chairman Stearns and the Members of this Subcommittee for providing me with this opportunity to testify.