This House would ban boxing.

Boxing, the physical skill of fighting with fists, originated as a sport around 800BC. It is a sport of antiquity that has had a troubled and contentious livelihood. The modern day sport has developed from rules and standards established since this time; with two participation forms: professional and amateur. Each has its own rules, although for both forms of boxing, a win is achieved by scoring more points than an opponent by delivering more blows to the designated scoring regions of the body (trunk and head), or by an opponent being unable to complete a bout. When first started, this sport was designed as entertainment for aristocrats who enjoyed watching two people ‘slug it out’ to the death. That history has continued into the present day sport which is a largely entertainment based activity, with millions of dollars of investment at the highest of levels. The potential dangers of the sport are a double-edged sword - they create both the entertainment aspect that makes boxing popular, but also run the risk of ending the sport altogether. In the 20th Century, approximately 1000 boxers died in the ring, or shortly afterwards. The youngest death was in a 12-year old participant. In the first decade of this 21st Century, an additional 68 participants have died as a result of their participation in boxing. Such deaths are more common in professional boxing, but deaths in amateur boxing have also been reported. Thousands more boxers have suffered permanent disfigurement, detached retinas in their eyes and various neurological complaints. Unfortunately for the sport, the most well-recognised and revered of all of its participants - Mohammed Ali - is now seen shuffling and mumbling as a result of Parkinson’s Disease which many incorrectly contribute to his boxing career. While neurological conditions (including chronic traumatic encephalopathy - which has almost exactly the same symptoms and signs as seen with Parkinson’s Disease) have been reported at high rates in former boxers, Ali is not one of its victims.

Despite a tightening of safety regulations, neurological and non-neurological injuries have continued with this sport. Most medical associations have policies against boxing, including the World Medical Association and the national bodies of the USA, Britain and Australia. Although the tightness of regulations upon boxing varies from country to country, and from state to state within countries, only a handful of countries have any kind of ban in place. Sweden is one country that bans professional boxing, although amateur boxing remains an Olympic sport.

As safety concerns over boxing have grown, high schools in most western countries have stopped offering it as a sport. Yet overall enthusiasm for boxing is at an all-time high; television audiences are up and record numbers of youngsters across the world are joining boxing clubs. In Britain the young Olympic silver medallist Amir Khan, who turned professional in 2005 and quickly won the title of World super lightweight champion, is a popular hero and role model. In a number of western countries where amateur boxing was losing popularity, especially the United States, interest has been renewed in the past ten years by the rise of women’s boxing and by white-collar boxing for office workers in their lunch-breaks. On the other hand, the large number of organisations claiming to be world bodies for boxing (e.g. WBA, WBO, IBF, etc), each with their own world champions, has damaged the credibility of the sport. Many people have also disliked the sight of aging former champions coming out of retirement in their forties or later, tempted by one last big purse.

The arguments below ask if boxing should be banned. Most apply to both the professional and amateur sports, but the last points deal particularly with banning the professional game while leaving amateur boxing legal. The arguments would also apply to most other forms of combat sport, for example cage-fighting.


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This House would ban boxing.


Curator:
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Boxing is a barbaric sport, and it should not be a part of any 21st century society.

Point:
Unlike in any other sport, boxers intend to physically injure their opponents by knockout. Allowing people to intentionally inflict injuries upon others for public entertainment and private profit is barbaric. Children especially are trained in these ways. When boxers turn professional, they have often already fought in at least 50 fights in their youth, which does not include the countless rounds of sparring during training sessions. Boxers are essentially being trained in violent ways, often at a young age. The Australian Medical Association actively opposes boxing for this reason, calling it, “a public demonstration of interpersonal violence which is unique among sporting activities.”[1] While there are other rough sports, boxing is different because its intent is harmful. The World Medical Association, which also opposes the sport, justifies this position by noting, “its basic intent is to produce bodily harm in the opponent.”[2] Boxing is a violent sport, in which youth are taught to try to hurt their peers. It has no place in modern society.


Counterpoint:
Labeling boxing ‘barbaric’ merely expresses one’s disapproval of it rather than suggesting reasons why it should be banned. People need to separate their ethical/moral judgements about the sport from their evidence-based scientific/medical reasons for banning it. Most people who call for a ban on boxing have no understanding of the ‘fight game’ beyond a gut disapproval of it. The appeal of boxing lies in its simplicity, the distillation of the sporting contest to its most basic form— a physical battle between two people. There is no “intent” in boxing to injure the opponent; it is merely to score more points than the opponents by hitting them within defined scoring regions of the body. Critics are more likely to attack boxing because it is more obviously a fight, rather than a game with a ball in which the athletes hit and tackle one another anyway.

The celebrity status that societies award to boxers glamorizes and legitimizes violence in society.

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Point:
Boxers are presented as beacons of success for young people, but they are not good role models. Children should not idolize people who make a living by injuring other people. In addition to the violence in the ring, brawls often break out at press conferences and even inside boxing venues. The marketing of boxing exalts this mindless violence and those who perpetrate it. Mike Tyson is a particularly harmful example. Tyson was one of the most popular and successful boxers in history, when he faced Evander Holyfield in the most hyped fight of the year. Tyson cruelly bit off a portion of Holyfield’s ear in the fight, on live television.[1] These are not role models of which we should be proud.


Counterpoint:
Every sport has the potential to glamorize and legitimize things that outside of sport we may not accept as appropriate. Boxing is one of the least bad culprits when it comes to promoting negative stereotypes to society. Far more dangerous is the 'sport' of professional wrestling where the violence is not part of a contest but a macho soap opera. Participants are routinely 'hit' over the head with metal objects to apparently no consequence, which sends out dangerous signals to the youngsters who form the majority of the audience. Boxing, on the other hand, only encourages its athletes to score points by hitting the body and/or head of their opponent. Mike Tyson is an extreme example, and he was severely punished for the Holyfield incident, being fined $3 million and sent to jail. If you want an example of a boxer who had morals, ethics and believed in something - you can’t go beyond Mohammed Ali as an exemplar role model for justice, belief and societal values. Even if it doesn’t set the greatest example for kids, most boxing is on late in the evening anyway and its impact on youngsters is therefore less damaging than that of other sports.

All professional boxing should be banned, not amateur boxing.

Point:
When most people think of boxing—the sport that they see on TV—they are thinking particularly of professional boxing, which is much worse. The main difference is that in amateur boxing the round lengths are often shorter as are the number of rounds and more protective equipment is worn. Therefore the level of exposure is minimised. As a result, 76 participants out of every million die, in professional boxing, but only six per million die in amateur boxing. That makes professional boxing more than 12 times more dangerous than amateur boxing.[1] The fact remains, however, that professional boxing is violent, barbaric, and dangerous, so it should be banned.


Counterpoint:
Prohibiting only professional boxing draws an artificial line between the professional and amateur sides of the sport. Differences in rates of injury are most likely due to differences in exposure and smaller sizing of generally younger athletes in the amateur ranks.
Boxing causes many deaths, and medical officials have continually called for it to be banned.

Point:
The British Medical Association has repeatedly called for a ban on boxing or a removal of the head from the permitted target areas. The body of medical evidence is growing that suggests even if a boxer survives individual bouts relatively unmarked, the cumulative effect of a career in boxing can lead to a greater susceptibility to chronic neurological injury. A doctor who has studied the effect of boxing on Parkinson’s specifically says that boxing causes unnecessary harm. He writes, “Unlike most degenerative neurologic diseases, this disorder can be prevented.”[1] Although the incidence of injury is much higher in sports such as basketball, rugby or riding, the risk of serious injury in boxing is far greater. That risk is so great that boxing should be banned. A ban, quite simply, would mean fewer people dead, injured or permanently brain damaged.


Counterpoint:
Just because medical associations don’t like something, it doesn’t mean they have the right to determine what individuals can and do choose to do with their recreation or work time. Given the scant medical evidence against boxing, it is highly hypocritical of medical associations which supposedly work on an evidence-based approach to suggest it should be banned. Although there are risks of injury in boxing, boxers are aware of the realities of their sport and are willing to take on this risk. This is the very mantra by which informed consent in medical procedures is allowed - so why not for participation in boxing? We allow individuals to take risks in all walks of life - in business, smoking, gambling and other activities. Every attempt is made to ensure that the risk of injury to boxers is minimised: thorough medical checks; doctors and appropriate equipment present ringside; and referees to intervene to stop fights. The best thing that governments and medical associations can do is to minimise the risks of injury to boxers.

Additionally, much recent now indicates that while chronic neurological injuries were common in boxers who fought in the early part of the 20th Century, this is no longer the case due to improved regulations and huge reductions in exposure risk for modern day boxers.[1] Therefore, there is no basis on which to use ‘old’ data to make a case for banning current day boxing.

More important than that anecdotal evidence, however, is the fact that boxing is no more dangerous than other sports and work activities. Worldwide, the risk to professional boxers is less than that to professional athletes in general.[2][3] Moreover, as Joseph Svinth writes, “both amateur boxers and high-school football players are much less likely to die of athletic injuries than they are to die in Mom’s car on the way to or from practice.” He indeed shows that the death rates per outing for cars tend to be higher than the death rate per fight for boxers.[4]

Boxing is famously exploitative, but a ban could prevent youth from falling into the sport’s economic trap.

Point:
To be successful, boxers have to train for 8 hours a day 6 days a week, spending the best years of their lives in the gym. Because most boxers lack a formal education and spend all their time in the gym they employ managers to handle their business affairs; very often the boxer’s entourage control the fighter’s destiny. This relationship can be exploitative given the inequality of bargaining power and the fact that most boxers need to make as much money as they can before they are worn out. An average boxer will have about 30-40 top-level professional bouts in them before their health and skills will dramatically deteriorate. Whilst it may well be in the fighter’s interest to hang-up his gloves, those around him have a financial incentive to push fighters into more and more title defences or comebacks. The decisions that older boxers make provide further proof that they feel they have been exploited: over 80% of older boxers surveyed in Chicago said that they did not want their children to be boxers.

The truth is that boxers are only treated as money-making devices by their promoters and the boxing industry. When American boxer Leavander Johnson died after a fight in 2005, his promoter told the press, “I don’t think there’s anyone to blame here other than the circumstances. He’s a victim of his own courage.” This shows promoters’ desire to exploit boxers’ “courage” and willingness to put themselves at risk, without having any regret for such a dangerous system. Oftentimes the promoters actively make it more dangerous, exploiting their clients for criminal ends. In his exploration of boxing deaths throughout history, Joseph Svinth finds that in addition to health reasons, many deaths were criminal, with the promoter playing the dual role of “gangster.” It’s time to break up this industry before any more young athletes get taken advantage of in a bad way.

Counterpoint:
That people participate in boxing for the money is one of the most often reported, but incorrect statements. Very few fighters compete in the sport for the money - they do it for the sport. In fact, very few ever make money out of it - most participants - even those that are ‘professional’ - still work full-time to pay for their participation in the sport. The people who make money out of boxing are the promoters, sports venue operators, television and about 1% of fighters.

Boxers love the one-on-one aspect of it; no tools, no resources, just you, your opponent, your training and your belief. That’s what gets them in the ring and that’s what keeps them there.

It is true that many boxers come from lower socio-economic backgrounds - but that does not necessarily mean they will be exploited. In some cases, boxing provides these people with a family, a drive for existence, a place where they can show who they are and do something they can be proud of. It doesn’t have to be exploitive - we could put limitations and regulations on promoters and trainers to make it better. It is a rare fighter who participates because he/she likes to be violent. That is more often the case for the people who aspire to be boxers, rather than those who actually compete in the
This House would ban boxing.

ring. For those that fight, there is a discipline and commitment that is needed, that if they were just doing it for violence or thrill - they wouldn’t last long.

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**Against**

**Point:**

The simple reason why boxing should not be banned is because it brings joy and entertainment to so many people, without providing harm. The government has no right to stop this practice from continuing. French sociologist Loïc Wacquant argues that the boxers themselves are the best evidence in support of the sport. When people talk about banning boxing, he writes, “one voice is invariably drowned out and lost: that of the fighters themselves.”[1] So many children dedicate themselves so that one day they might become successful boxers. We cannot take away this dream.


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**Counterpoint:**

Youth could still be inspired and it would be part of the culture through amateur boxing. As a first step, professional boxing at least should be banned, as is already the case in countries like Sweden, Cuba and North Korea. Even if adults wish to fight each other for sport, violence should not be encouraged by financial reward. The amateur sport is at least much better regulated, with credible governing bodies and tough rules on wearing helmets, the length of fights, the role of the referee, etc. Knock-outs are very rare and serious injuries much less common than in the professional game (although there are still deaths each year in amateur boxing).

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**Against**

**Boxing is dominated by the working classes and a ban would rob many people of opportunity to participate in a sport that requires discipline and commitment.**

**Point:**

A ban on boxing would be classist, because it would disproportionately hurt the working class. Most people who want to ban boxing are more well-off people who are turned off by its gritty nature. This is an aesthetic complaint that is most often based on an ethical or moral judgement against the sport, when the fact of the matter is that boxing is not especially violent for members of the working class and it provides great opportunity for those who are skilled at the sport. The risk of death to professional boxers is lower than the risk for most manual laborers. U.S. construction workers, for example, are more than three times more likely to die on the job than professional boxers are to die from the sport. U.S. farm workers are more than five times more likely.[1] Boxing is a great opportunity for members of the working class, and banning it would hurt them especially.

Boxing rules and regulations should be strengthened, not banned.

Point:
Boxing should not be banned; whatever problems there are with the sport can be fixed with reforms. The World Health Organization has called for tighter regulation, including “Simple rules, such as requiring medical clearance, national passports to prevent boxers from fighting under more than one name, restricting fights for fixed periods after knockouts, requiring that ringside physicians be paid by the state and not the promoter, and making sure that the boxers are aware of the potential long-term consequence of boxing may help protect boxers to some degree.”[1] The Australian Medical Association additionally “recommends that media coverage of boxing should be subject to control codes similar to those which apply to television screening of violence.”[2] Finally, the World Medical Association suggests that all matches should have a ring physician authorized to stop the fight at any time.[3]

It has been reported that no safety regulations would be effective if head blows remain20 - however such authors incorrectly apportion blame on boxing for a group of diseases known as Parkinson’s Syndrome. Boxing can result in chronic traumatic neurological conditions if fighters are not well matched, and fight without regulations in regard to their exposure. Boxing cannot cause Parkinson’s Disease or other conditions such as Alzheimer’s Disease as those are genetic conditions - so to include them together as one set of conditions is incorrect and misleading.

About 80% of deaths are caused by head, brain, and neck injuries,[4] so the removal of the head as a scoring region may make a huge difference to the injury outcomes for this sport. However it would also change the very nature of the sport; and may mean people won’t participate in it. Ultimately, governments should do what they can to make boxing as safe as possible, without losing the essence of the sport or banning it entirely.


Counterpoint:
The reality of boxing is that no matter what precautions are taken, blows to the head will always lead to the medical problems that have caused so many injuries and deaths. In his study of Parkinson’s syndrome in boxers, Joseph Friedman concludes that no safety regulations would have helped “the plight of our former boxing superstars…in the slightest.”[1] The suggestion that the head should be taken out of the target area is equivalent to suggesting that football should be played without goals. It clearly would not preserve “the essence of the sport.” There is no evidence that head-guards prevent anything but cuts, and they can even exacerbate certain injuries. Paradoxically, shortening rounds may lead to greater incidence of injuries as instead of out-pointing an opponent over 12 rounds, boxers would have a greater incentive to go for knockout punches. No matter what the government might do to the sport, boxing will always be violent and dangerous. The only option is to ban it.

A ban would not remove boxing from society; it would only drive it underground, creating a much more dangerous culture around the sport.

Point:
Throughout history we have seen that placing blanket bans on things (alcohol, cigarettes, illicit drugs, cockfighting, etc) do not work. People will still find a way to do what they want and when you remove the ability to regulate something by ignoring its existence, you have the potential to create more problems. There is certainly the potential that such is the popularity of and desire to see boxing that a ban would just drive it underground, where fights would be unregulated and unsupervised by qualified medics. Crowd trouble can also be a problem at boxing venues, and unless the proper security arrangements are made, many people could be hurt. The safety of boxers and fans should be paramount and therefore to minimise the risk of injuries to all it should remain legal but regulated.

One of the reasons for such popularity of the sport in recent years is the increasing use of boxing training as a fitness approach in gyms and other training venues. There is such an acknowledgement of the effectiveness of boxing training as a training approach that banning boxing clubs will make it difficult for people who are doing legitimate training to do so.

Counterpoint:
It is not a valid argument to claim that boxing would 'go underground'. Dog fighting and cockfighting were banned to protect the welfare of the (admittedly non-consenting) combatants. Consent, however, is not the important issue - welfare is. When cockfights come to the attention of the police the perpetrators receive hefty penalties. These penalties are an effective deterrent to these 'sports' and they are now all but extinct in most countries. A boxing ban would also deprive the sport of television exposure, which would cut off its primary source of revenue. The government would also shut down boxing clubs, making it harder for people to fight and train. All of these factors would prevent boxing from thriving underground.

Banning boxing would force people to channel their aggression into more harmful, violent activities.

Point:
There is no conclusive scientific evidence linking increased contact sport participation with being more violent in social settings. Such statements make it sound as thought we would have not violence in society if all contact sport was removed - and we all know that is untrue. Boxing isn’t about violent aggression, it is about controlled aggression - this is very different to violent behaviours. In a report on “violent” sports in schools, conducted by the Lance Armstrong Foundation, a martial-arts instructor explained, “Contact and combat sports allow students to deal with their aggression in a safe environment, rather than in the context of the classroom or school hallway.”[1] This type of outlet is not only important for youth, but for adults as well.


Counterpoint:
Encouraging people to fight in the ring encourages them to fight outside of the ring as well. Violent sports like boxing don’t provide an outlet for people who would otherwise be violent; they actually train people to become violent. Studies have
This House would ban boxing.

repeatedly linked sports to violent activity outside of competition. One paper published in the *American Sociological Review* concluded, “there is a strong relationship between contact sports and violence.”[1] Boxing is the quintessential contact sport, and so it should be banned because it encourages violence in and out of the ring.


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**Bibliography:**


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This House would ban boxing.

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