Participation in Boxing Among Children and Young Adults

The American Academy of Pediatrics opposes boxing in any sports program for children and young adults. Amateur boxing is potentially dangerous and yet youngsters are involved in boxing at ages 3 to 4 years. Approximately 15,000 boxers between ages 10 and 15 years are registered with the National Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Junior Olympics boxing program. There may be an even larger number of young boxers in community organizations. Impoverished youths view boxing as a means of financial gain with the potential of providing a new life. Unfortunately, for many, it is a means of improving their physical condition at the risk of slow progressive brain injury, with occasional or no financial rewards. Other sports offer the same conditioning opportunity with minimal or no risk of brain injury.

In contrast to professional boxing, amateur boxing is apparently for prestige, recognition, and the enjoyment of winning. Proponents of boxing suggest that it teaches self-defense and discipline, that it builds character and confidence, and that it is relatively safe. Opponents of boxing stress that the principal goal is to render the opponent senseless.

Ironically, protective headgear may actually increase brain injuries. The degree of physical injury in boxing correlates with the physical strength and activity of the participants; the greatest risks exist when participants are obviously mismatched. The fatality rate in boxing is reported to be low. However, the frequency of chronic brain damage is an increasing concern in the medical community.

Recent studies using computed tomography (CT) scanning have revealed brain injury in young boxers. Detection of such brain injury was previously missed by EEG, neurologic testing, and other standard prefight medical examination procedures. Studies have shown that neuropathologic changes occur in human beings or animals knocked unconscious from a blunt blow to the head. "Accumulated destructive (brain) effects of repeated blows even when consciousness and posture are not lost are well known and accepted."

It is unlikely that boxing will ever be abolished in the United States; therefore, it is crucial for pediatricians to become vigorous opponents of boxing as a sport for any child or young adult. Simple changes in rules and medical supervision, and increased awareness of the dangers of boxing are not enough. Our opposition to boxing should be expressed at the time of health maintenance or preparticipation examination; opposition should be expressed in public whenever the opportunity presents itself; and our opposition should be expressed as a printed recommendation in brochures available in pediatric waiting rooms. Children and young adults should be encouraged to participate in sports in which intentional head injury is not the primary objective of the sport.

REFERENCES

THE SCIENTIST TRIBE

Since the turn of the century, scores of men and women have penetrated deep forests, lived in hostile climates, and weathered hostility, boredom and disease in order to gather the remnants of so-called primitive societies. By contrast to the frequency of these anthropological excursions, relatively few attempts have been made to penetrate the intimacy of life among tribes which are much nearer at hand. This is perhaps surprising in view of the reception and importance attached to their product in modern civilised societies: we refer, of course, to tribes of scientists and to their production of science. Whereas we now have fairly detailed knowledge of the myths and circumcision rituals of exotic tribes, we remain relatively ignorant of the details of equivalent activity among tribes of scientists whose work is commonly heralded as having startling or at least extremely significant effects on our civilization.

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