



DEPARTMENT OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS
BUSINESS, CONSUMER SERVICES, AND HOUSING AGENCY • GOVERNOR GAVIN NEWSOM

CALIFORNIA STATE ATHLETIC COMMISSION

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Members of the Commission

Peter R. Villegas, Chair

Dr. Vernon Williams, Vice Chair

AnnMaria De Mars

Ronald Fiore

Christopher Gruwell

Douglas Hendrickson

Scott Wetch

COMMISSION MEETING OF THE CALIFORNIA STATE ATHLETIC COMMISSION

MEETING MINUTES

Monday, March 4, 2024

10:00 a.m. - Conclusion of Business

Location:

Department of Consumer Affairs

1625 North Market Blvd.

Main Hearing Room Suite 102

Sacramento, CA 95834

Commissioners Present

Chair Peter R. Villegas

Vice Chair Dr. Vernon Williams

Commissioner Ronald Fiore

Commissioner Christopher Gruwell

Commissioner Scott Wetch

Commissioner Dr. AnnMaria De Mars

Staff Present

Andy Foster, Executive Officer

Patrisha Blackstock, Assistant Executive Officer

Kenneth Swenson, Legal Counsel

Claudia Ron, Staff Services Analyst

OPEN SESSION

Agenda Item 1 – Call to Order / Roll Call / Establishment of Quorum

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chair Peter Villegas. Executive Officer (EO) Andy Foster called roll; Commissioner Hendrickson was absent. Quorum was established.

Agenda Item 2 – Chairman’s Opening Remarks

Chair Villegas welcomed everyone to the first Commission meeting of 2024 and acknowledged the enthusiasm and passion of his fellow commissioners for the work they do with the Athletic Commission.

Agenda Item 3- Review and Possible action to approve the December 9, 2023, Commission Meeting Minutes.

Chair Villegas presented the December 9, 2023, Commission meeting minutes for approval.

*Commissioner Gruwell **moved** to approve the meeting minutes.*

*Commissioner Dr. De Mars **seconded** the motion.*

No Commission or public comments

The motion passed 5-0 by roll call vote. Vice Chair Dr. Williams Abstained.

Agenda Item 4- Election of Officers Pursuant to the Requirements of the Business and Professions Code 18606

Legal Counsel Mr. Swenson opened for nominations for Chair. Commissioner Wetch praised the work the Commission has been doing and nominated Chair Villegas. Chair Villegas accepted the nomination. There were no other nominations. There were no Commission or public comments.

*The implied **motion** is to elect Chair Villegas as Chair of the Commission.*

The motion passed 5-0 by roll call vote. Chair Villegas abstained.

Legal Counsel Mr. Swenson opened for nominations for Vice Chair. Chair Villegas nominated Vice Chair Dr. Williams due to his medical expertise and passion for the Commission and combat sports. Vice Chair Dr. Williams accepted the nomination. There were no further nominations. There were no Commission or public comments.

*The implied **motion** is to elect Vice Chair Dr. Williams as Vice Chair of the Commission.*

The motion passed 5-0 by roll call vote. Vice Chair Williams abstained.

Agenda Item 5- Discussion and Possible Action regarding Team Combat League's Request for a temporary Promoter license in order to Hold an Event using Team Combat League Rules pursuant California Code of Regulations, title 4, section 533.

EO Foster explained that Team Combat League held two events last year using Thompson Boxing's promoter license with approval of the Commission. He explained that the promoter has changed ownership and is seeking a promoter license. The request event is for March 28th, but EO Foster explained that the Commission would not have the staffing available for that weekend as it already busy. EO Foster and Chair Villegas explained that the prior events held were time consuming which required the staff and officials to work long hours. Chair Villegas asked if the Commission would be able to limit the length of the event. EO Foster said he would be able to limit the number of bouts.

*Commissioner Gruwell **moved** to approve Team Combat League for a temporary promoter license to hold an event.*

*Commissioner Wetch **seconded** the motion.*

No Commission or public comments.

Motion passed 6-0 by roll call vote.

Agenda Item 6 – Discussion and Possible Action regarding Approving the Request for a Boxers Pension Distribution from retired boxer Paul Banke.

Mr. Swenson explained that pursuant to Rule 408 of the boxing rules of the CCR 4.408.b empowers the Commission to determine all questions arising in connection with the administration, interpretation, and application of the Boxer's Pension Plan and gives the Commission all power necessary or appropriate to accomplish the duties under the Plan.

EO Foster explained that Paul Banke was a boxer who was a part of the original pension plan and when the plan was switched over to the current plan his funds were not transferred for some reason. After the LA Times article was released, Mr. Banke applied for the pension. EO Foster stated that the Commission was not able to locate Mr. Banke's complete records but believes he does qualify for the pension. The question is how much Mr. Banke is entitled to. EO Foster's stated that the options to pay Mr. Banke were to pay him the average payout from the last 3 years (~\$21,000), or since he would have vested in 2014, they could take and pay the average of 2014-2016 (~\$18,000). Commissioner Dr. De Mars agrees that given that the Commission knows Mr. Banke qualifies for the pension plan, but cannot determine exactly how much money he has that paying out the average is a good idea, and paying the higher amount would be the best option.

*Commissioner Dr. De Mars **motioned** to approve the application for benefits and fix the amount of benefit at \$21,017.89 (the average of the 3 prior years).*

*Commissioner Fiore **seconded** the motion.*

No Commission or public comments

The motion passed 6-0 by roll call vote.

Agenda Item 7 – Review, Discussion and Possible Action Approving Proposed Changes to Previously Approved Text Amending Section 299, of Article 6, of Division 2, of Title 4 of The California Code of Regulations – Dehydration and Rehydration.

EO Foster explained he is bringing the dehydration regulations back to the Commission to review. He explained that if the Commission were to cancel bouts where fighters gained back 15% of their body weight, it would decimate events. EO Foster brought up a list of fights where fighters gained back 15% and pointed out some of the more well known and bigger bouts that would have been canceled under the proposed regulation. EO Foster explained that one of his ideas is to instead fine fighters 20% of their purse and give it to the opponent.

Commissioner Wetch asked what we would do with the fines if both fighters were over 15%. EO Foster explained that perhaps the fines could go to the Commission. Commissioner Dr. De Mars thinks the fine is a good idea because the opponent would be going into the fight at a disadvantage. She stated she had an issue with the proposed wording about requiring fighters to move up in weight class due to its nebulous wording. Commissioner Wetch asked if the opponent of the fighter that gained over 15% would still be required to fight. EO Foster explained that when there is a large discrepancy between the fighters the inspectors will speak out the opponent and ask if they would like to continue with the fight and if they do not, they still receive their purse. EO Foster stated it may be possible to add something to the bout agreements regarding the consequences and fines of gaining back too much weight. Vice Chair Dr. Williams noted that 15% weight gain was the amount the doctors agreed was a significant amount of weight for the fighters to be gaining back. EO Foster stated he will take all the Commissioners' comments and work on revising the proposed regulation and present an update at an upcoming meeting.

Stephen Fong with the Office of Administrative Law noted that the Commission will need to clarify any "may" statements in the proposed regulations and that it would be best to withdraw the previous approval and direct Commission staff to return with new language at another meeting. Mr. Swenson noted that fighters that come in underweight at the weigh-in should probably not be penalized the same as the fighters that gain back 15% and the Commission should address that in the new language.

*Commissioner Gruwell **motioned** to rescind the prior proposed text from the March 2023 Commission meeting and direct Commission staff to return with new language at another Commission meeting.*

*Commissioner Fiore **seconded** the motion.*

Joe Stevenson spoke about his experience with weight cutting.

The motion passed 6-0 by roll call vote.

Agenda Item 8 - Executive Officer's Report

a. Budget Update for the Support Fund, the Neurological Fund, and Pension Program:

EO Foster informed the Commissioners that, to date, the Commission has deposited \$1,551,000 into the support fund. EO Foster met with the Budget Office prior to the meeting, and they explained that the Commission will expend between \$2.1 and 2.3 million this fiscal year. EO Foster stated the Commission was able to collect the max fees from the UFC event. He also explained that the Commission has been receiving more revenue from wrestling events than had been initially anticipated. EO Foster explained that the upcoming events should help with the revenue and may allow the Commission to at least break even if not become revenue positive. He did note that TGB has not submitted a request to hold an event for this year yet. EO Foster noted that the neurological fund has been collecting additional revenue thanks to the regulation Vice Chair Dr. Williams helped with. EO Foster stated that the Commission has begun collecting and reporting for the MMA Benefit Fund and as of February 28th \$15,722.71 has been deposited into it.

b. Update on the Proposed Changes to Unified Rules of MMA:

EO Foster explained that he is the Chair for the ABC's Rules Subcommittee and is spearheading two changes to the Unified Rules of MMA. EO Foster explained that he and Commissioner Wetch were at an event in Sacramento where a fighter was picked up and slammed directly on their head (spiked). EO Foster said what they saw concerned them and he felt that it should not be a legal move. Commissioner Wetch explained that referee Herb Dean came to them after the bout and explained the need to change the rules to prevent that move. EO Foster stated that they are still beginning to discuss how to change the rules to address spiking.

- a. Kneeing and/or Kicking the head of a grounded opponent: EO Foster explained that the current rule says if the fighter's hand is down, they cannot be kned in the head. However, fighters have been putting their hand down and picking it back up over and over again. He stated that oftentimes the opponent cannot tell if their hand is down. EO Foster's solution is to require something other than the hand (e.g., knee, elbow) to be touching the mat to be considered grounded. EO Foster presented video examples to the Commissioners. EO Foster

explained that he would suggest that the ABC vote on the suggested rule changes to allow for at least 6 to 8 months prior to taking effect so that fighters have time to learn about the rule change. He also suggested that the vote should happen before the officials training in July, so the referees are able to teach the new rules at the upcoming ABC Conference.

- b. Downward pointing elbow strike (12 to 6): EO Foster explained that the 12-6 rule is antiquated and makes no sense since fighters still have the ability to do an 11-5 or a 9-3 elbow. He presented a video example. EO Foster explained that removing this foul would help referees with officiating bouts consistently.

c. Report on Pending and Proposed Regulations:

Mr. Fong reiterated the decision from agenda item 7. He also noted that the pension package will be addressed after the Sunset Review.

d. Status Update of Delegated Entities

- *California Amateur Mixed Martial Arts Organizations (CAMO)- J.T Steele:* The quarterly report from CAMO was submitted by Mr. Steele and can be found in the meeting materials. Mr. Steele explained CAMO is still working on getting their online assignment platform up and running.
- *USA Boxing (USA Boxing)- Andrew Banuet:* The quarterly report from USA Boxing was submitted by Mike McAtee and can be found in the meeting materials. Mr. Banuet thanked Lee Palmer and Rogelio Chapa for their help with preventing unsanctioned events that were reported. Mr. Banuet also noted that Jajaira Gonzalez from Glendora, CA has qualified for the 2024 Olympics in Paris.
- *United States Fight League (USFL)-Joe Stevenson:* The quarterly report from the USFL was submitted by Joe Stevenson and can be found in the meeting materials. Mr. Stevenson stated that the USFL has been having great success with the character development program with the Cedar Sinai Kerlan-Jobe Institute and will be adding the number to the suicide hotline to their website.
- *International Kickboxing Federation (IKF)- Toni Fossum:* The quarterly report from IKF was submitted by Ms. Fossum and can be found in the meeting materials. Ms. Fossum shared that the appetite for Muay Thai/Kickboxing has been increasing in California.

e. Staffing update:

EO Foster explained that the Commission has been continuing their work with Monica and Peter at the Public Affairs office. Monica has been helping with getting the specialized license plate paperwork completed and submitted. Christine Lally has helped the Commission get new athletic inspectors hired. The Commission office is still running with historic low staffing levels, but EO Foster stated he is not yet comfortable enough to hire new office staff. The commission now has 67 inspectors

and 171 officials. EO Foster noted that Mike North, one of the Commission's best timekeepers, will be retiring after 25 years.

f. Upcoming Event Schedule:

Mr. Foster went over upcoming events that the Commissioners may want to attend.

Agenda Item 9 – Public Comment on Items Not on the Agenda

Cameron Frizell briefed the Commission on his journey to becoming a professional boxing referee.

The next Commission meeting will be held Monday, June 3, 2024, with the location to be determined.

Meeting adjourned at 11:52 AM