



MEMORANDUM

DATE	May 16, 2017
TO	Commissioners California State Athletic Commission
FROM	Andy Foster, Executive Officer California State Athletic Commission
SUBJECT	Agenda Item #8 - Review and Approval of Commission 10 Point Plan to address severe dehydration from extreme weight cutting in Mixed Martial Arts

In combative sports like Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), athletes are placed in weight class categories in order to provide a fair match between contestants and to protect the health and safety of the athletes. The goal to meet the threshold of a certain weight class is often met primarily by dehydrating the body. While this issue is practiced by many within MMA, not all athletes are cutting dangerous amounts of weight. This creates a safety and competitive issue regarding the fairness of the bout and effectively circumvents the purpose of the weight classes. Many athletes that should be in a heavier weight class gain a competitive advantage at the expense of those athletes who naturally belong in that weight class. In addition, many athletes who would be satisfied to fight in a weight class closer to their natural walking weight are essentially forced to cut large amounts of weight because they are concerned that their opponent will be.

Consequently, weight cutting is a common and dangerous procedure used by athletes in combative sports for competitive advantage. Just in the past two years, two athletes have died cutting weight, many others, including athletes in California, have been hospitalized, and major events have been impacted by the loss of significant bouts. Because of this issue the Commission pursued emergency regulations to curb severe dehydration. Those emergency regulations were the first step in a more comprehensive policy. This is an industry-wide health and safety concern and measures to prevent athletes from using severe dehydration as a method to make the contracted bout weight at events regulated in California should be considered. I have invited participation from MMA industry stakeholders and have received a lot of feedback which has been helpful in establishing a consensus.

The recommended 10 point plan for MMA outlines measures that can be taken to ensure the health and safety of professional athletes. These steps can occur without the use of additional regulations, as regulatory authority currently exists.

1. Licensing by Weight Class - Requesting the MMA athlete to select the lowest weight class they intend to compete. Following up with a series of questions related to dehydration and weight cutting will allow the Commission to better approve matches and track critical weight information. The Physical Examination associated with the Commission's licensing application requires that the licensing physician certify that the requested weight class is safe for the athlete. (Authority – Rule 210, 280 & 298)

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2. Changes to the bout agreement to obtain parity with boxing - Draft and approve a contract that fines the contestant that fails to make the contract weight 20% of his compensation equally distributed to the Commission and the opponent, as well as 20% of all bonuses (including win bonuses) to the opponent. This will force fighters to compete at weights closer to their natural walking weight. It will also reward fighters who take a fight against a larger opponent and lose. (Authority – Rule 220)
3. Additional weight classes. 165, 175, 195, 225. Along with licensing by weight class and physician certification, the new weight classes are essential so that each individual athlete has more options to choose a class that is suitable for them. (Authority – Association of Boxing Commissions)
4. Implement policy changes to the way matches are approved with an emphasis on appropriate weight class. A formal request has been made to the Official Database of the ABC to add a weight class category as a required field. (Authority – Rule 240 & 281)
5. Weight Class restrictions for fighters who miss weight more than once. A fighter who misses weight more than once may be required to compete in a higher weight class until a physician certifies the weight is appropriate and is approved by the Commission for competition in the weight class. (Authority – Rule 283 & 298)
6. Continue early weigh-ins to allow maximum time for rehydration and mental preparation for the combat sports competition. (Authority – Rule 297)
7. A second weight check the day of the event to ensure fighters have not gained more than 10% of their body weight back in the 30 hours between the official weigh in and the event. Fighters who gain so much weight between weigh in and the fight may be recommended to move to the next weight class for future bouts as directed by the ringside physician. (Authority – Rule 285)
8. Checks for Dehydration by specific gravity and/or physical by Ringside Physicians at both the official weigh in and the second day weight check. (Authority – Rule 281 & 299)
9. A recommendation of a 30-day and 10-day weight check for advertised high level title fights. The WBC has success with this approach in boxing, and it provides for safe benchmarks. While this “weight check” could be manipulated because a Commission inspector is not always available to supervise this, we can do it by Skype or other electronic means. While not perfect, this is simply a way for the Commission physicians to keep track of the fighter’s progress to the intended weight class. (Authority – Rule 285)
10. Matchmaker, Promoter, Trainer, and Athlete examination and Education regarding weight cutting and dehydration as it relates to offering, accepting, and contracting of bouts. (Authority – Rule 217)

RECOMMENDATION

I have determined this issue to be one of the Commission’s primary health and safety concerns and recommend the approval of these measures to prevent athletes from using severe dehydration as a method to make the contracted bout weight at events regulated in California. I further recommend that the Commission consider immediate implementation of this plan with a six-month review period, during which time the Commission can invite stakeholder feedback and revise the plan where appropriate.