



Boxing: *Boxing Australia Inc.*

'Boxing follows the general principles that everyone is to be treated fairly and equitably'.¹

The first record of pugilism was found in Egypt and dates back to year 3000 BC. Boxing evolved over time and became part of the first Olympic Games held in 688 BC in Olympia. More than 2600 years later, boxing remains part of the Olympic Games programme. The first boxing competition at the modern Olympic Games was held in 1904 at St-Louis (USA) with bouts in seven weight divisions.²

Several years later, representatives of the national associations of England, France, Belgium, Brazil and the Netherlands met at a preparatory conference for the foundation of an international boxing federation FIBA (the *Fédération Internationale de Boxe Amateur*).

International boxing competitions rapidly appeared, allowing amateurs to compete in prestigious tournaments. In 1946, the FIBA was dissolved and the English Amateur Boxing Association, in partnership with the French Boxing Federation, created AIBA (the *Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur*).

With a total of 195 countries and territories currently affiliated to AIBA, the International Boxing Association is among the world's largest sporting organisations.³

Australian boxers have represented their country at the Olympic Games since Snowy Baker won a silver medal in the middleweight division at the 1908 London Olympic Games. Our boxers have won silver and bronze medals at previous Olympics, but Australia is yet to produce an Olympic gold medallist. This is a major objective for amateur boxing, along with the broader development of the sport in Australia.⁴

Australian Boxing Inc.

Boxing Australia Inc. is the national federation for amateur boxing in Australia. It was established in 1924 when the six states agreed to form the Boxing Union of Australia, which changed its name to the current one in the late 1990s.

The organisation is recognised as the national sporting body for boxing by the Australian Sports Commission, the Australian Olympic Committee, the Australian Commonwealth Games Association and the International Amateur Boxing Association (AIBA).

The national body conducts the Australian Championships each year, and sends teams to major international events including the Olympic and Commonwealth Games. It also administers Australia's Olympic representative boxers and develops the sport throughout Australia.

Boxing Australia has full responsibility for all state and territory member associations, who in turn have responsibility for amateur boxing matters in their region, including: the training and accreditation of amateur boxing coaches, judges and referees, the registration of boxers, coaches and officials, and the enforcement of strict safety standards in the sport.

Boxing Australia is faced with many challenges and responsibilities that require a dynamic and strategic approach to the planning and conduct of the sport. Their vision is to provide good leadership, efficient administration, sound financial management, and the provision of services to state and territory member associations, amateur boxers, boxing trainers, referees and judges and the amateur boxing community as a whole.⁵

To help achieve this Boxing Australia adopted a new governance structure in December 2004, which took effect in April 2005. In the last 18 months the organisation has worked to establish this new corporate governance structure across all member associations and ensure that it complies with ASC principles.

Who boxes?

Boxing Australia is aiming to establish a national membership database system in the next 12 months to formally record who is participating in the sport.

There are no actual membership figures available, nor is there any official data on participation from CALD and Indigenous people in the sport. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that many boxing members are from a working class background and there are a large number of migrants or children of migrants as participants.⁶

Top boxers such as Anthony Mundine and Jeff Fenech (now trainer) attract many Indigenous and culturally diverse kids to their gyms to train and many join local YMCA or Police Citizen Youth Clubs in their local community.

Issues affecting participation

There are several issues affecting participation in boxing, including gender and age restrictions in some states.

The rules and safety procedures for amateur boxing are set out by amateur boxing organisations and generally reflect the rules of the International Amateur Boxing Association (AIBA). However, there are some differences in amateur rules between countries, and between boxing organisations in any given country, in relation to matters such as juniors and masters.⁷ In some states, government policy or legislation restricts younger boxers from competing, for instance in NSW boxing is banned for boys aged under 14 years.

Women have been competing in amateur codes in most states for several years, and Boxing Australia introduced a senior women's division to the Australian Championships in March 2002. However, the most populous state (New South Wales) has a legal bar against women competing in amateur competitions.⁸

Safety concerns

Another issue which affects the participation and growth of boxing are concerns about the safety of the athletes, given the sport's contact nature, particularly head contact.

In a message addressed to the International Boxing Association, former IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch explained that “enormous progress has been achieved in the measures of safety and the rules concerning the practice of this sport”.⁹

Over the past 20 years, safety precautions in amateur boxing have been increased significantly and, as a result, the rate of injury has decreased. In fact, the injury rate in amateur boxing today is lower than for many other commonly-played sports.¹⁰

Amateur boxers in Australia, must (when competing) wear a head-guard, mouthpiece and a genital protector (males) or breast protector (females). Referees may stop a bout at any time if one of the contestants appears unable to continue because of injury.

If a boxer is knocked out, or where the referee stopped the contest because of a head injury, the incident is recorded in the boxer’s records and they cannot box or spar for several weeks. Where several knockouts occur over a period of months, the boxer’s period of exclusion is increased accordingly, up to one year.

These precautions are necessary for the safety of boxers and to convince a cautious public of the positive benefits of the sport. Of course, professional boxing is entirely different with a different set of rules and regulations.

Cultural diversity within boxing

Many of Australia’s present boxing champions have a diverse multicultural background. Russian born Kostya Tszyu and ‘The Marrickville Mauler’ Jeff Fenech are Australian heroes and Armenian born IBF world flyweight champion Vic Darchinyan is rapidly following in their footsteps. Nedal ‘Skinny’ Hussein and Lovemore Ndou are but two others who are flying the Aussie flag in the world boxing ring.

There are no specific programs or strategies adopted by Boxing Australia to increase the participation of people from CALD backgrounds in the boxing as there is already a large multicultural mix involved in the sport. However, the national body has been involved in cross cultural awareness training with the Australian Sports Commission.

Islam and drug testing

In June 2006, reigning under-19 Australian amateur middleweight champ Omar Shaick refused to take a drug test because of his Islamic faith. Shaick said: “Being a Muslim doesn’t mean I am different to any other athlete. But the procedure is against my belief”.¹¹

In what is believed to be the first case of its kind in Australia, the Lebanese Muslim informed Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority (ASADA) testers his religion prevented followers from exposing their genitals to others. Shaick could be outed for a mandatory two years and stripped of his title, pending an upcoming hearing before the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

Concerned about the consequences, Shaick sought advice the following day from Dr Mohammed Abdullah – an imam at his local mosque and director of Griffith University’s Islamic Research Unit – Abdullah confirmed Shaick’s stance was “consistent with” the Islamic tenant of modesty, Haya”.¹² Abdullah also said: “Unless it’s extremely necessary, or an emergency, one must not expose their private parts in front of others”.¹³

The case has the potential to rock drug-testing procedures across the globe and may affect millions of Islamic athletes world-wide if they are forced to adhere in conflict with their faith. Champion boxers Hussein Hussein and brothers Ahmed and Mohammed Elomar have already pledged to also put faith ahead of sport.

Indigenous boxers

Australia has a strong tradition of elite Indigenous boxers. This was fostered early last century by the widely-acclaimed Sharman Boxing Troupe, which originated when Jimmy Sharman was crowned the Riverina Lightweight Champion in 1910.

His boxing troupe made its debut at the Ardlethan Show in 1911 and continued for some 50 years, in which time many of the champion boxers (mostly Indigenous) commenced their boxing careers in the Sharman tent.

Jimmy Sharman's boxing troupe was known Australia-wide. These shows relied heavily on Aboriginal boxers and audiences and he insisted on tight contracts, prohibited consumption of alcohol by both performers and spectators, discouraged punch-drunk fighters and opposed colour discrimination.

His troupe left a legacy that was carried forward by many other Indigenous Australians, none more so than the legendary Lionel Rose.

From poverty to world champion - Lionel Rose

Lionel Rose is one of Australia's greatest sporting heroes. He was the first-ever Aboriginal Australian and the second-ever Australian to win a world title when he defeated Japanese world champion Masahiko 'Fighting' Harada to become world bantamweight boxing champion - a title which he successfully defended twice. Rose was named 'Australian of the Year' in 1968 - the first Aboriginal person to receive this honour - in a ceremony conducted by Governor-General Richard Casey. He was later awarded an MBE for services to sport.¹⁴

He finished his career with a record 53 fights, 42 wins and 11 losses. Rose captured the imagination of the Australian sporting public by rising from poverty and obscurity and earned a place in Australian sporting folklore as one of the country's greatest fighting champions.

While there had been many great Indigenous boxers before him, Rose was the first to become a star on the world stage, and he paved the way for the success of other Aboriginal boxers who have followed, including father and son boxing champions Tony and Anthony Mundine.

Anthony 'The Man' Mundine

Few other athletes can boast that they have made it to the top in two sports, as Anthony 'The Man' Mundine has done. A first grade rugby league player with St George Illawarra and a NSW State of Origin representative, Mundine left the sport in 2000 to pursue his dream of becoming a world boxing champion.

The son of former world title contender, Tony Mundine, Anthony never fought as an amateur but after just 18 months he challenged for the IBF super middleweight belt, and in 2003 won the WBA title. An inspiration to many Indigenous people, Mundine defeated Danny Green in Australia's most watched fight in 2006 and is set to challenge for another world title.

Boxing Australia are hoping to find another 'Rose' or 'Mundine' through a project they are currently developing with the Australian Sports Commission to discover new Indigenous boxing champions.

Youth development

Young promising boxers are developed through the Australian Institute of Sport boxing program – an Olympic Athlete Program initiative. International coach Bodo Andreass was appointed national head coach in 1997 and is based at the AIS in Canberra. Initially he worked around the country with Australia's leading amateur boxers and coaches and conducted national team camps at the AIS. Scholarships are now offered to high performance boxers considered by Boxing Australia to achieve success at the international level.¹⁵

Member protection

Boxing Australia aims to ensure that every person involved in the sport is treated with respect and dignity, as well as being safe and protected from abuse. They also ensure that everyone involved in the sport is aware of their legal and ethical rights and responsibilities.¹⁶

To ensure that AIBA standards are observed throughout the sport, Boxing Australia and its member associations only permit members to participate in boxing competitions or bouts which they conduct or approve. Any 'toughman' contest, however titled, is not approved by Boxing Australia and can not be approved by a member association.¹⁷

Over the last 12 months the organisation has developed their Member Protection Bylaw in line with the Australian Sports Commission Member Protection Policy template. Boxing Australia has also developed contracts with state and territory member associations to deliver these bylaws. They are working on ensuring that the states and territory associations have a similar contract in place with affiliated clubs and organisations by the end of 2006.

Discrimination and harassment

Boxing Australia recognises that those involved in the sport cannot enjoy themselves, perform to their best, or be effective or fully productive if they are being treated unfairly, discriminated against or harassed. The organisation is opposed to all forms of harassment and discrimination.

Any person who feels they are being harassed or discriminated against by another person or organisation bound by their Member Protection Bylaw is encouraged to contact a member protection officer to lodge a complaint.

Under the Bylaw:

Discrimination is defined as 'treating or proposing to treat a person less favourably than someone else in certain areas of public life on the basis of an attribute or personal characteristic they have (such as race, sex, age) or are thought to have'.¹⁸

Harassment is defined as 'any type of unwelcome behaviour that a reasonable person would recognise as being unwelcome and likely to cause the recipient to feel offended, humiliated or intimidated'.¹⁹

Vilification 'involves a person or organisation doing public acts to incite hatred towards, serious contempt for, or severe ridicule of a person or group of persons having any of the attributes or characteristics within the meaning of discrimination. Public acts that may amount to vilification include any form of communication to the public and any conduct observable by the public'.²⁰

Code of conduct

The purpose of Boxing Australia's Code of Conduct is to declare the standard of conduct they expect of its members, and to declare specific behaviour considered inappropriate and contrary to the interests of the sport. Actions or behaviour which are found to breach the code can result in disciplinary action.

All coaches, athletes, officials, representatives, volunteers, and members of Boxing Australia and its state and territory member associations are bound by this Code.

Under the Code, Boxing Australia expects its members to:

- treat all persons with respect and courtesy and have proper regard for their dignity, rights and obligations;
- always place the safety and welfare of children above other considerations;
- comply with all relevant federal and state laws, particularly anti-discrimination and child protection laws; and
- be responsible and accountable for their conduct.²¹

Inappropriate behaviour may include:

- discriminatory or offensive conduct towards or treatment of a person, related to their actual or presumed gender, marital status, pregnancy, parental status, race, age, disability, sexuality;
- transgender, religion, political belief or industrial activity;
- abusing, denigrating, harassing or attempting to intimidate any athlete, coach or official;
- victimising a person for making a complaint.²²

ACT Equal Opportunity Policy

Of interest, the ACT Boxing has an Equal Opportunity Policy which requires that the association shall provide equal opportunity to all members, including: boxers, coaches and officials, to participate in the affairs of the association without discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, age, sexual orientation or gender.²³

Complaints

Any person may make a complaint about a person or organisation bound by Boxing Australia's bylaw if they reasonably believe that it has been breached. A complaint should be reported to a Member Protection Officer and will be kept confidential.

A complaint can be about an act, behaviour, omission, situation or decision that someone thinks is unfair, unjustified, unlawful, or a breach of this Bylaw.²⁴

The bylaw also states that if a person feels they have been harassed or discriminated against, they can seek advice from a state or territory equal opportunity commission without being obliged to make a formal complaint. If the commission advises the person that the problem appears to be a type of harassment that comes within its jurisdiction, they may then make a decision as to whether or not to lodge a formal complaint with that commission.

Endnotes

¹ Boxing Australia Inc Chairman Ted Tanner.

² <http://www.aiba.net/home.aspx>.

³ <http://www.aiba.net/home.aspx>.

⁴ Boxing Australia 2005-2009 Strategic Plan at <http://www.boxing.org.au/documents/StrategicPlan2005-2006finalversion.pdf>.

⁵ Boxing Australia 2005-2009 Strategic Plan at <http://www.boxing.org.au/documents/StrategicPlan2005-2006finalversion.pdf>.

⁶ Boxing Australia Chairman Ted Tanner.

⁷ <http://www.ozboxing.org/rules.htm>.

⁸ <http://www.ozboxing.org/rules/gender.htm>.

⁹ <http://www.aiba.net/home.aspx>.

¹⁰ <http://www.ozboxing.org/health/safety.htm>.

¹¹ http://townsvillebulletin.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,7034,20087360%255E23218,00.html.

¹² 'Muslim boxer says no to test' by Josh Massoud in the *Daily Telegraph*, 10 August 2006.

¹³ 'Muslim boxer says no to test' by Josh Massoud in the *Daily Telegraph*, 10 August 2006.

¹⁴ http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/indg_excel.html.

¹⁵ <http://www.ais.org.au/boxing/>.

¹⁶ <http://www.boxing.org.au/documents/MemberProtectionPolicy3%20on%20web.pdf>.

¹⁷ Boxing Australia ByLaws at <http://www.boxingaustralia.org.au/documents/BY-LAWS.pdf>.

¹⁸ Boxing Australia ByLaws at <http://www.boxingaustralia.org.au/documents/BY-LAWS.pdf>.

¹⁹ Boxing Australia ByLaws at <http://www.boxingaustralia.org.au/documents/BY-LAWS.pdf>.

²⁰ Boxing Australia ByLaws at <http://www.boxingaustralia.org.au/documents/BY-LAWS.pdf>.

²¹ Boxing Australia Code of Conduct.

²² Boxing Australia Code of Conduct.

²³ <http://boxingact.org.au/documents/policies/fairness.pdf>.

²⁴ Boxing Australia ByLaws at <http://www.boxingaustralia.org.au/documents/BY-LAWS.pdf>.

