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Combat Sports Special Issue

Editorial

INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON COMBAT SPORT

The World heavyweight professional boxing championship is arguable the biggest prize in sport. Why is this the case? It is not just the glamour that is appealing, but also the intriguing appeal of two combatants in a fixed environment. All combat sports share this similarity and in doing so, combat sports become appealing for spectators to watch, provide competitors with their ultimate challenge, and provide sport scientists and medics with a rich environment to apply their work. The role of research and theory driven interventions is key to the credibility of sport science and sports medicine. An intervention and/or treatment must be based on sound reason and the effects should be considered beforehand, both positive and negative. Equally, the nature of combat sport, where the aim is to strike, throw, or grapple with an opponent which can lead to injury, invariably raises questions on whether it is morally acceptable for these activities to be called a sport. Therefore, thorough investigation of the nature of medical issues is needed. The case for banning boxing in inextricably linked to the notion that the aim of the sport is to cause harm to the opponent; if harm was minimized and injury became less of an injury, the case for banning boxing would be weak. Quite clearly there are a plethora of arguments that point to a need for theory driven research in combat sport, and plugging this gap in the literature is an aim of this special issue of the Journal of Sports Science and Medicine. Possibly the most convincing argument for me to get involved in driving this issue stems from experiences in applied work with professional boxers (Hall and Lane, 2001; Lane and Hall, 2003), amateur boxers (Lane, 2002), kickboxers (Lane, et al., 1999) and tae-kwon-do athletes (Chapman et al., 1997) in which a raft of situations and issues were presented that required answers based on research and theory. An intention of this special issue was to provide up-to-date research in combat sport that can be used by theory driven practitioners and theorists alike.

The authors for this special replied to an open call for papers. The principle that we select the best is key to raising quality. All papers were subjected to peer review. Nineteen papers have been published out of the 41 that were submitted, and given no papers were rejected because they did not focus on combat sport, it is argued that the resultant papers represent quality submissions. Diversity in terms of where authors come from and the range of topics covered also is a strength of this issue. Articles have been submitted from all around the World: From Brazil, to India, from the USA to the UK – a perusal of the papers and represents an impressive range of countries interested in this edition. Articles cover a range of different subjects and disciplines. Smith (2006) provides a comprehensive review of physiological variables associated with boxing performance. Data are taken from consultancy experiences and provide normative data for use by practitioners and researchers alike. On a related theme, Khanna and Manna (2006) provide normative physiological data on a sample of Indian Boxers. A number of studies investigate physiological factors in combat sport. O'Donovan O. et al. (2006) investigate leg, trunk strength and reaction times of hard-style martial arts practitioners. Beekley et al. (2006) investigate aerobic capacity body composition of sumo wrestlers to athletes in combat and other sports. Baker and Davies (2006) investigated the variation in resistive force selection during brief high intensity cycle ergometry and discussed the implications of these results for power assessment and production in elite karate practitioners. Ribeiro et al. (2006) investigated heart rate and blood lactate responses to modern wushu techniques. Imamura et al. (2006) conducted a three-dimensional analysis of the center of mass for three different judo-throwing techniques. McGuigan et al.

(2006) explore the utility of isometric strength training among a sample of wrestlers. Body fat and weight management play an important role in combat sports. Kazemi et al. (2006) identify the profile of the Olympic champions and Pieter et al. (2006) assess the relative total body fat and skinfold patterning of Filipino national karate and pencak silat athletes. Bledsoe et al. (2006) examine the prevalence and incidence of injury in Professional Mixed Martial Arts Competitions. Nunan (2006) sought to develop a sport-specific fitness test for competitive Karate practitioners with results suggesting that the new test accurately simulates the actions of competitive Karate sparring. Blais and Trilles (2006) propose a specific piece of apparatus designed to enhance judo performance

In terms of skill analysis, Hristovski et al. (2006) examine the factors that boxers use when deciding to punch a target. Myers et al. (2006) investigated judging practices and processes in Muay Thai. The subjective nature of combat sport scoring means that this is an universal issue.

Devonport (2006) uses qualitative techniques to explore psychological issues relate to success in kickboxing. Stevens et al. (2006) used a transactional design to investigate changes in mood states and emotions in a judo player during Olympic trials. Wong et al. (2006) explored mood-performance relationships among Malaysian athletes with results lending some support to the conceptual framework for mood-performance relationships offered by Lane and Terry (2000). Jones et al. (2006) investigated motivational profiles of martial artists.

The range of articles and suggestions for future research should inspire researchers and practitioners alike to investigate the efficacy of their interventions, test the validity of the measures, develop new measures and develop specific theories. This special edition has raised more questions than answers but in doing so, hopefully, a fuller understanding of the nature of combat sports might emerge.

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