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BOXING

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DEBATING MATTERS
TOPIC
GUIDES

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MOTION:

**“COMPETITIVE
BOXING IS
BENEFICIAL FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE”**

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In August 2009 the International Olympic Committee chiefs voted to lift the barrier to the last all-male sport boxing, meaning women boxers will have the chance to fight for gold at the 2012 Olympics. [Ref: [BBC](#)]. This follows on from a perhaps surprising demand from some quarters to introduce boxing into British schools, with head-lines proclaiming: “Boxing back on the timetable in state schools.” [Ref: [Daily Mail](#)]. According to School Sport Magazine [Ref: [School sports mag](#)], 2009 saw the first inter-school boxing contests since the mid-1960s, taking place in Manchester and Plymouth, with further tournaments planned nationally. The School Amateur Boxing Association (SABA) has trained teachers in 45 schools across London, Manchester and the South-West. Further support has been leant by retired boxing champion and former Sports Personality of the Year winner, Joe Calzaghe, who has spoken publicly of his support for making boxing mandatory in schools [Ref: [The Times](#)], whilst think tank Civitas joined forces with the London Boxing Academy [Ref: [Civitas](#)] and received some relatively enthusiastic, acclaim [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. The sport is now being touted for its beneficial impact on the physical and mental health of young people. In the context of recent concern amongst policy makers and commentators about an obesity ‘epidemic’, ‘anti-social’ behaviour and a purported increase in childhood depression [Ref: [BBC](#)], perhaps boxing can play a positive role. Proponents of the sport argue that young people could do with a good dose of the discipline, self-reliance and hard work that boxing instils, and that the sport should be more widely encouraged. But others vehemently disagree. Traditional opponents of the sport, most notably the British Medical Association [Ref: [BMA](#)] have condemned all proposals to encourage young people to ‘get boxing’ on medical



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grounds, and some critics go further still: boxing, says Dr George D Lundberg, 'is an obscenity [that] should not be sanctioned by a civilised society'. Others remain unconvinced of whether boxing, or any competitive sport, should be used to serve these kinds of agendas at all. Is it time for young people to get in the ring, or to hang up the gloves?

THE BOXING DEBATE IN CONTEXT

Why box, when you can....?

Descriptions of the practice of boxing from boxers, fans and coaches portray the sport as an exercise in discipline, self-control and dedication, not as an uncontrolled act of aggression. [Ref: [Independent](#)] Boxing promoter Frank Warren argues, "kids with lots of energy, maybe disruptive or a bully, can channel their aggression in the boxing gym" [Ref: [The Sun](#)]. Highlighting reports of out-of-control classrooms and stay at home youth, those pushing to introduce boxing in to schools suggest that the sport can help develop those skills and traits that some young people are reportedly failing to gain elsewhere [Ref: [Sweet Science](#)]. But critics remain sceptical arguing that there are plenty of other competitive contact sports in which young people can get involved that don't carry the same risk. [Ref: [Wales Online](#)]. Indeed, competitive sport has made a comeback in schools after an extended hiatus [Ref: [The Telegraph](#)]. Following GB's successes at the Beijing Olympics, Gordon Brown and others have reappraised the physical and moral benefits of competition, identifying its' potential in tackling some of the problems thought to be blighting young people. So why look to boxing specifically to solve broader social and health problems, when it entails such obvious risks for the young?

Is competitive boxing a step too far?

Despite the supposed advantages of young people becoming involved in boxing, there are concerns when it comes to putting children in the ring to compete. The British Medical Association [Ref: [Independent](#)] and the charity Headway [Ref: [Wales Online](#)] oppose the sport of boxing altogether on the basis that the potential damage done to its competitors' health is too severe to be justified in the name of fitness, entertainment, leisure or any other social effect. The sport has had its fair share of casualties; high profile examples include the brain bleed of Joe Mesi [Ref: [New York Times](#)], brain damage suffered by Gerald McClellan [Ref: [Sports Illustrated](#)], as well as the sport's continued link with long-term neurological damage [Ref: [Sunday Star Times](#)]. For some, the idea that boxing should be re-introduced on health grounds sits uneasily with the concern that the sport could do real damage to the health of young people, particularly when there is evidence to suggest that amateur boxing poses similar risks [Ref: [New Scientist](#)]. But proponents suggest that concerns are overstated and accuse the BMA and others of paternalism [Ref: [New Humanist](#)]. They argue that although there is a risk that young people will be injured when boxing, this is true of many types of sporting activity, including football, rugby, karate or hockey. Some of those pushing to widen participation in boxing argue that resistance to the sport is part of a broader cultural unease with competition [Ref: [Manifesto Club](#)], but others are less forgiving. Scottish columnist Brian Hennigan writes that most resistance to boxing 'boils down to class snobbery' and the perception that boxing is 'a dirty, working-class sport.'



Is a boxing culture desirable?

Aside from objecting to the sport on medical grounds, some argue that endorsing a sport in which the primary aim is to render your opponent incapable is culturally beyond the pale. A number of recent studies report that, contrary to popular belief, rather than distilling aggression, participation in boxing and other contact sports actually increases young people's propensity to violence [Ref: [Psychology Today](#)]. Critics of boxing, and competitive sport more widely, argue that the fundamental premise of competitive sport is to pit person against person, and is unacceptable in this day and age. Others, including former boxer and Labour MP Paul Flynn, argue that boxing is a degraded sport that exploits working class and ethnic minority young people, who are attracted to it. Indeed, even some of the sports' most enthusiastic supporters have admitted to feeling some ambivalence about its values. Following the now infamous fight between Ricky Hatton and Manny Pacquiao in May 2009 [Ref: [The Times](#)] sports journalist and boxing fan Matthew Syed argued that as Hatton was knocked to floor for the third time, all boxing fans had to ask themselves 'how, in a civilised society, one can condone such a spectacle?' But other fans are less defensive: boxing, says Times journalist Mick Hume, 'is not a tickling contest'. Recognising that boxing is organised violence by consent does not mean that it is not a fascinating sport, 'primal' yet full of 'balletic grace'. Others suggest that it is naive to suppose that aggression is not part and parcel of all sport. The point, they argue, is that sport, and boxing in particular, codifies and regulates aggression, putting it to a creative use.



ESSENTIAL READING

The Big Question: How dangerous is boxing, and are doctors right to want to ban it?

Jeremy Laurence *Independent* 7 December 2007

Sport spotlight: boxing

PE & Sport Today September 2007

FOR

Fighting youth crime through boxing

Leslie McCarthy *Financial Times* 9 February 2009

Boxing is the best way to stop violence in kids

Charlotte Leslie *Guardian* 14 April 2008

I'm not just teaching them boxing. I'm teaching them skills for life

Michael Tierney *Herald* 8 January 2008

Boxing in schools is such a knockout idea

Brian Hennigan *Scotsman* 6 February 2007

AGAINST

Boxing's injury toll a disgrace

Richard Boock *Sunday Star Times* 10 May 2009

Ricky Hatton and a punch felt around the world

Matthew Syed *The Times* 6 May 2009

Trust me I'm a junior doctor

Max Pemberton *Telegraph* 10 September 2007

Lack of Regulation, Not Tyson, Is Boxing's Problem

Gregory Jordan *New York Times* 1 August 2004

IN DEPTH

When it comes to the punch...

Nick Morrison *TES* 7 March 2009

Boxing: it's not a tickling contest

Rob Lyons *spiked* 10 December 2007

Legal fights likely to halt move for school boxing

Claire Hughs *Yorkshire Post* 10 December 2007

A noble art that is ethically cleansed from Tyson

Kate Hoey *Guardian* 22 October 2001

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BACKGROUNDEERS

Landing a big punch for pupils' discipline

Richard Fitzpatrick *Irish Times* 28 January 2009

Boxing Clever

Liz Lightfoot *Guardian* 17 June 2008

Boxing: Fight game punches its weight again in social rings

Alan Hubbard *Independent* 16 December 2007

Death in the ring has long been a part of boxing

Graham Houston *ESPN Sports* 13 November 2007

Why noble art is back on map

Stuart Brennan *Manchester Evening News* 7 November 2007

Fight the good fight: preacher who knows more than most about

Bible-bashing

Emily Dugan *Independent* 22 September 2007

Giving those Oxbridge toffs an education in the noble art

Jim White *Telegraph* 3 February 2007

Boys that box

Lauren Aaronson *Psychology Today* 1 November 2005

Battered women: female boxing is brutal and hopeless

Benjamin Wallace-Wells *The Free Library* 1 March 2005

Noble art still plagued by Tyson

Robert Phillip *Telegraph* 1 February 2002

Sport Medicine and the ethics of boxing

Suzanne Leclerc and Christopher D Herrera *Western Journal of Medicine* June 2000

The noble art of not getting thumped

Mark Steel *Independent* 11 December 1998

Schools: Boxing

House of Lords

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ORGANISATIONS

Sweet Science UK

Headway

British Boxing

British Medical Association (BMA)

Boxing Action

School Amateur Boxing Association (SABA)



IN THE NEWS

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Loverro: After death, Schulberg is still a giant
Washington Times 8 August 2009

Put boxing on school curriculum, says Calzaghe
Wales Online 22 October 2008

Once forbidden in China, boxing a big hit
USA Today 20 August 2008

Charity hits out at Joe's support for school boxing
Wales Online 23 March 2008

Boxing back in PE lessons as way of channelling aggression
The Times 8 March 2008

Amateur boxers suffer brain damage too
New Scientist 8 May 2007

More variety for school sport, says Johnson
Guardian 1 February 2007

Boxing goes back to school
BBC News 1 February 2007

Bruno backs boxing's return to London schools
Independent 31 January 2007

School's bring back boxing lessons
BBC News 30 January 2007

Sir Henry Cooper: Enduring, endearing and still going at it
hammer and tongue
Independent 6 August 2006

Johnson dies from brain injury sustained in title fight
ESPN Sport 23 September 2005

BOXING; Suspension Upheld, but Boxer Is Fighting It
New York Times 21 June 2005

Owen and Pintor united by memories of ring tragedy
The Times 18 September 2003

Boxing slammed as most dangerous modern day sport
ABC News 9 April 2001

Primary pupils taught to box
Sunday Herald



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Debating Matters because ideas matter. This is the premise of the Institute of Ideas & Pfizer Debating Matters Competition for sixth form students which emphasises substance, not just style, and the importance of taking ideas seriously. Debating Matters presents schools with an innovative and engaging approach to debating, where the real-world debates and a challenging format, including panel judges who engage with the students, appeal to students from a wide range of backgrounds, including schools with a long tradition of debating and those with none.



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I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area

I am interested in becoming a Debating Matters judge

I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters

Other (please specify)

First name

Surname

School/company/organisation

Professional role (if applicable)

Address

Postcode

Email address

School/work phone

Mobile phone

**“TEENAGE CITIZENS
THINKING DEEPLY
ABOUT...SOCIAL
ISSUES”**

IAN GRANT, CEO, BRITANNICA

