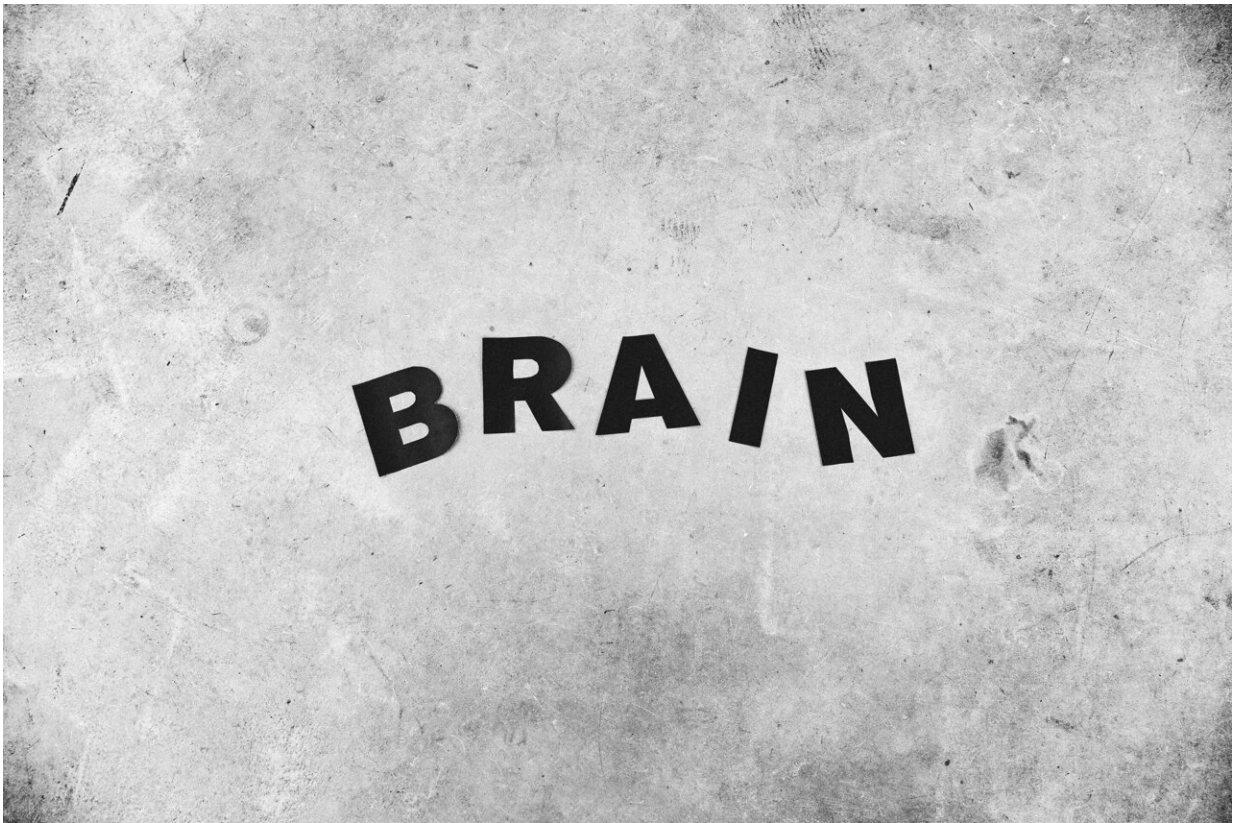


How to stop boxing deaths and brain injury with a simple rule

May 26 2017, by Simon Chapman



Credit: SHVETS production from Pexels

The [coronial inquest](#) in Sydney into the death by subdural haematoma (brain bleed) of 28-year-old boxer Davey Browne has yet again seen the same [predictable response](#) about how we might prevent such outcomes in

the future.

Solutions proposed by boxing officials, administrators and pundits are framed about when exactly a fight should be stopped, more even matching of boxers, greater latitude for trainers to throw in the towel and limiting pre-bout weight loss.

These solutions are as meaningful as if the Titanic's owners had removed splinters from the liner's handrails to reduce death and injury.

By 2015 there have been reportedly [2036 known boxing matches](#) where a competitor had died.

What's the point of boxing?

In boxing, the main objective is to hit your opponent as directly and as hard as you can in the [head](#), rendering them unconscious. The punch that knocks a boxer down so fast they can't stand up within 10 seconds is what the crowds are baying for. It's what pulls the crowds in and sees massive ticket prices for ringside seats in the hope of the glorious climax of a man being knocked out.

According to an [article](#) on what happens when boxers are knocked unconscious, a professional boxer's punch can generate speeds of about 40-50 kilometres per hour.

The article continues, quoting research published in the journal [Neurology](#):

"A neurochemical reaction begins in the brain cells that cause cell death. The more cells that die, the fewer brain tissue you have ... It may explain why people who suffer from head injuries are never quite the same afterward."

How common is this?

We don't have much [good quality data](#) about how commonly boxers suffer [brain injury](#) and later impairment. The few studies available don't separate amateur and professional boxing. Professional boxing matches can last 12 rounds, while amateur matches last three. Amateurs also wear headgear, while professionals don't.

[This study](#) of 30 professional boxers found the following range of impairment (from none to severe): 11 boxers were had normal brain function, with no signs of impairment, 12 had mild deficits, four were moderately impaired and three had signs of severe impairment. Boxers who had 12 or more professional bouts had significantly higher levels of brain injury.

An obvious solution

Fouls in boxing consist of hitting below the belt, holding, tripping, kicking, head butting, wrestling, biting, spitting on, or pushing your opponent.

If we reversed the rules on fouls to make a punch to the head a foul and a punch below the belt (aimed at the [cods](#) or testicles), a scoring shot, the brain injury problem would be resolved. Boxing might consider a change of name to "codswalloping".

Every boy and man who has playing a body-contact sport has experienced the instantly sickening feeling being hit, kneed or bumped in their "[orchestra stalls](#)".

For those who have never had the experience, [here](#) are five men's eloquent accounts of the unforgettable, deeply imprinted sensation.

A blow to the head can cause concussion, [brain](#) injury and occasionally death. But a blow to the groin, while instantly and nauseatingly painful, may occasionally cause minor trauma that needs surgical correction, and infertility. Yet, it is extremely unlikely to cause major trauma or death.

[Rugby union](#) and [league](#) have long banned tackling around the head and head locking, and in [AFL](#), any contact with opponents' heads is instantly penalised. Crowds get this. Yet in boxing, the crowd bays for the maximum risk of damage.

The spectacle of grown men trying to thump each other in the crotch would also have boundless comedic appeal. Evasive stepping and hip swivelling would emerge in those most adept at defensive codswalloping. Codswalloping with the Stars would be an instant TV viewing magnet.

The [Australian](#), [British](#) and [World](#) medical associations have often called for boxing to be banned. Let's get serious with [boxing](#) reform.

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