



December 4, 2023

Re: Health and Safety for Combat Sports

This is written in enthusiastic support of the initiatives proposed by the Athlete's Voice Committee (AVC) that I believe will improve brain health and safety in combat sports.

As background, I am a neurologist with the Cleveland Clinic and have guided the largest longitudinal study of professional fighters, the Professional Athletes Brain Health Study (PABHS). As part of this study, we have surveyed the perceived knowledge of fighters regarding concussions and long-term effects of head impacts. While one might think that fighters are aware of the risks of participating in their sport, the results of the study suggest otherwise. The findings revealed significant gaps in fighters' understanding of concussion symptoms and neurological consequences of exposure to head impacts (Bennett et al. *Phys Sportsmed*. 2019).

Education is clearly the first step to empower fighters to make appropriate decisions for their training and careers. I strongly endorse the recommendation by AVC to require as part of licensing a health and safety education module for both the fighters and their trainers. In addition, information about concussions should be labeled on common equipment used in combat sports such as gloves and headgear. We have found that participants in the PABHS do have an interest in learning more about concussions and ways to train more safely but do not know where and how to access this information. The simple measures put forth by the AVC would help solve this problem.

Though combat sports inherently involve the intent to cause concussion, athletes that participate should be aware of the risks to long-term brain health and familiar with the symptoms of brain injury. By providing this information in an accessible format and requiring fighters and trainers to complete the training for licensure, regulatory agencies will be advancing brain health and safety in combat sports.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles Bernick".

Charles Bernick, MD, MPH

Senior Director, Cognitive Disorders

Cleveland Clinic Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health