

## ***From USA Hockey***

This is something all coaches and associations should strictly forbid.

### **Experts raise alarm bells over 'locker boxing'**

Medical experts are ringing alarm bells over a so-called rite of passage for adolescents, played out in hockey and lacrosse locker rooms across North America, known as "locker boxing."

The battles, also known as a "cage match" or "helmets and gloves" are generally held after a game, with teammates sitting around cheering on the combatants. A match typically pits two players against each other in an all-out boxing match.

Required equipment includes helmets and hockey gloves as competitors attempt to land more blows to the head than their opponent.

Only punches to the head are permitted, and the match is stopped when one of the fighters gives up, gets knocked down, or their helmet is knocked off.

An editorial in the May/June edition of the *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine* brings attention to the dangerous fighting game, pointing out the risks of concussion, in addition to the black eyes, broken noses and bloodied lips that often occur.

The editorial described locker boxing as "adolescent risk-taking behaviour with significant potential for concussion."

"These are children who are getting concussions out of what they think is a sport, which is fairly dangerous for them," Dr. Kevin Gordon of Dalhousie University, the lead author of the editorial, told CTV News.

The editorial states that teen athletes often view the battles as a "time-honoured test of manhood," and feel peer pressure to participate.

For Scott Randles, a 14-year-old from Lower Sackville, N.S. who suffered a concussion from locker boxing two years ago, it's had a life-altering effect.

Following Randles' locker boxing concussion, he had three other hockey-related concussions, one coming just three games after the initial incident.

Now, two years later, his memory is weak and he has trouble concentrating.

"Sometimes I blank out and I'll look at the clock and it will be two minutes later," Randles said. "It's a lot harder to learn stuff, and it's a lot harder to remember things."

Contact sports are no longer an option, but he's taken up playing guitar and bass to fill the void.

His mother, Sharon Randles, told CTV.ca she was horrified by her son's injury.

"You hope not, but you're expecting that if your child is going to get hurt playing hockey it's going to be on the ice," she said.

The editorial describes three other adolescents who were involved in locker boxing matches. Two were male hockey players, while the third was a female hockey player.

In all three cases, the participants experienced concussion symptoms such as dizziness, pounding headaches and unsteadiness or the inability to stand on their own. But in all the cases described, the athletes played their next scheduled games and the injuries weren't reported for several days, because of the secrecy surrounding locker boxing.

One of the males, a 15-year-old, was knocked unconscious during a match in a dressing room before a hockey game.

He remembers hearing a teammate say "There's a haymaker," and then later regaining consciousness on the ground.

Though he suffered all the symptoms of a concussion, he went back to his daily routine.

"But he didn't really recover because when he went back to play subsequently, every time he was in a game, he took a check, became a little weak about the legs," Gordon told CTV's Canada AM.

"His game performance would deteriorate progressively over the course of the game. He was recognized as having a concussion, came to my care and that's where I learned about the game."

The second male, 13, was knocked out by an uppercut during a bout with a larger adolescent. He had already suffered two previous concussions in the preceding months.

In the third, and perhaps most surprising incident noted in the editorial, a female on an under-17 hockey team was rendered unconscious during a fight, and fell limply to the ground after being hit. When her coach came to the door to investigate, her teammates dragged her unresponsive body out of sight.

"Everyone thinks this is just the boys doing it, but in actual fact we have some evidence or a report in our article of actually girls playing it," Gordon said.

"I've now had three reports, each time the girls don't play to the knock down. They often play directly to

the unconscious player on the floor."

The editorial suggests that many coaches are aware locker boxing takes place, and that it is tolerated and even encouraged in some cases, particularly by lacrosse coaches.

Coaches need to be more proactive in preventing cage matches from taking place, the editorial urged, pointing out that Hockey Canada's rules outline requirements that make team officials responsible for locker boxing.

Rule 47 reads as follows: "Team officials shall be responsible for their conduct and that of their players at all times. They must endeavour to prevent disorderly conduct before, during or after the game, on or off the ice and anyplace in the rink."

The report also suggested that parents and coaches should increase supervision and ensure players are fully aware of the risks associated with locker boxing.

"Our major concern these days with concussion is of getting reinjured when you're actively concussed," Gordon said.

"Since these are unrecognized and unreported concussions these players are often putting themselves at risk of that more severe concussion as they return to play."

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