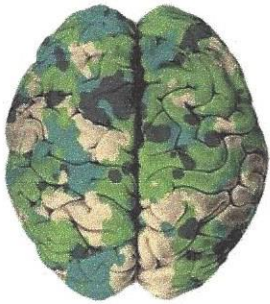


A Class in Concussions: Does boxing make better soldiers?

[Rolf Gainer Ph.D.](#) | September 30, 2015

[Share](#)



The U.S. Military Academy at West Point, The Naval Academy in Annapolis and the Air Force Academy still require a class in boxing which in some cases is “a class in concussions” for the cadets. Lt. Col. Nicholas Gist, the Director of Physical Education at West Point refers to the required course: “We want to expose them to fear and stress and teach them confidence to respond. We’d rather teach that at the Academy than in Iraq or Afghanistan.” Data obtained by the New York Times shows that the boxing classes produce 20% of the concussions at West Point and 25% at the Air Force Academy. In the last three years, West Point had 97 documented concussions from boxing which was more than any sport. At the Naval Academy boxing accounted for 25% of all

concussions, more than twice as many as football.

“No brain trauma is good trauma-even if there are not diagnosable concussions, there can be lasting damage” Robert Cantu, MD a leading expert in concussion and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) research from Boston University. There is an ongoing argument about the merits of the mandatory boxing program which is weighing the experience gained in boxing as well as the risks of missing training, classes and becoming more vulnerable to further injuries later. While protocols are in place at the service academies to identify concussions and restrict students from academics, sports and training for a recovery period. Dr. Cantu cautions that “repeated jabs to the head can lead to lasting injury, even if there are no documented concussions.” The evidence of CTE in retired NFL and NHL players and boxers is mounting. Given what we know about brain injury exposure in the military, shouldn’t the military service academies give thought to inherent risks of the sport and the hidden long-term effects?

I was interviewed a few weeks ago by an upstate New York sportswriter, Bill Buell, about boxers and brain injury and he wanted to discuss a former boxer who was serving time in Florida for a double murder. His question was: “Could that boxer’s brain injury been the cause of his violent behavior. I couldn’t answer that question for him, but we talked at length about boxing in our childhoods, the changes in the sport and ultimately he asked: “Should boxing be outlawed?” I referred him to Ray Ciancaglini, a retired boxer and the founder of The Second Impact, an organization devoted to preventing repeat concussions in sports. The issue is prevention and we heard that clearly in our interviews with Ray Ciancaglini here on NeuroNotes.

Can the issue of prevention be transferred to the military? Are there alternatives way to teach military cadets a way to manage fear and stress which could be transferred to combat situations?

[Click here to read the New York Times story and weigh the facts.](#)

[Air Force Academy boxing concussions](#), [chronic traumatic encephalopathy](#), [concussions from boxing](#), [CTE](#), [Naval academy boxing concussions](#), [Nicholas Gist](#), [Ray Ciancaglini](#), [Robert Cantu](#), [The Second Impact](#), [West Point boxing concussions](#)