

## BOXING

Boxing is unique among professional sports in that there is no nationwide commission that oversees it, no regular schedules, no seasons, and few universal rules. Every set of matches (called a card) is set up separately, usually by one of a handful of top-level boxing promoters. Each state has its own boxing commission with its own set of rules. Some state boxing commissions regulate the sport more rigorously than others, and the different governing organizations establish their own regulations. For example, variations exist regarding whether a boxer who has been knocked down can be "saved by the bell," whether a referee or a ringside physician has the authority to stop a match, and whether a match should automatically be stopped if a fighter is knocked down three times within one round.

Boxing matches in the United States consist of a maximum of twelve three-minute rounds with one minute of rest between rounds. Opponents in a fight must belong to the same weight class, with competitors being weighed before the fight to ensure that neither holds an unfair weight advantage. The three judges at ringside score the fight according to a ten-point must system; that is, each judge must award ten points to the winner of the round and fewer points to the loser of the round. Matches end in one of five ways:

- Knockout—one fighter is unable to return to his feet within ten seconds of a knockdown
- Technical knockout—a decision is made to stop the fight because one fighter is clearly losing
- Decision—the fight ends without a knockout or technical knockout and is won based on the scoring of the three judges at ringside
- Draw—the fight ends without a knockout or technical knockout, and the scorecards award each fighter the same number of points
- Disqualification—the fight is stopped because of a rule infraction on the part of one of the fighters

Unlike other professional sports, boxing does not use a playoff series or point system to name a champion. In fact, there is not necessarily even a consensus about who is the champion of any given weight class. Different champions are recognized by several competing boxing organizations. The most prominent boxing organizations are the World Boxing Association, the World Boxing Council, the World Boxing Organization, and the International Boxing Federation. A fighter may be recognized as champion in his weight class by more than one of these organizations at a time, or each may have a different champion at any given time. Some of the biggest boxing matches are unification bouts between champions recognized by two different sanctioning organizations, the winner walking away with both titles.

Because boxing competitions are often international in nature, it is difficult to gauge the size of the boxing industry in the United States. In "The Shame of Boxing" (Nation, November 12, 2001), Jack Newfield estimates professional boxing to be a \$500-million-a-year business. Much of the money comes from cable television, where championship fights are usually broadcast on a pay-per-view basis.

Boxing has a long history of both glamour and corruption. It has inspired famous writers such as Norman Mailer (1923–2007), Albert Camus (1913–1960), Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961), and Joyce Carol Oates (1938–), and landmark films such as *The Champ* (1931), *Body and Soul* (1947), *On the Waterfront* (1954), *Requiem for a Heavyweight* (1962), *Raging Bull* (1980), *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), and the *Rocky* series (1976–2006). However, because the scoring system is complex and because the overall rankings often appear somewhat arbitrary, the sport has long been a

tempting target for organized crime and others seeking illicit financial gain. Even in the twenty-first century bribery is thought to be rampant. Mysterious judging decisions and bizarre rankings are not at all rare. Boxing's reputation also suffers because of the sheer brutality of the sport. Fighters have sometimes died or suffered disabling brain trauma as a result of a particularly violent bout. Mike Tyson (1966–), a former heavyweight champ and convict, once bit off part of an opponent's ear in the ring. Newfield cites several cases of fixed fights, rigged rankings, cronyism, and instances of money being prioritized over safety.

### **World Boxing Association**

The World Boxing Association was the first sanctioning body of professional boxing. It was formed as the National Boxing Association (NBA) in 1921. The first NBA-sanctioned match was a heavyweight championship fight between Jack Dempsey (1895–1983) and Georges Carpentier (1894–1975). Brilliant and colorful champions such as Joe Louis (1914–1981) carried the WBA through the World War II (1939–1945) era. The dawn of television boosted the popularity of professional boxing in the 1950s. The sport's globalization during this period led the organization to change its name to the World Boxing Association in 1962.

### **World Boxing Council**

The World Boxing Council was formed in 1963 by representatives of eleven countries (United States, Mexico, Venezuela, Panama, Peru, Brazil, Japan, Argentina, Spain, Great Britain, and the Philippines) and Puerto Rico. Its purpose, according to WBC founders, was to improve the standards of professional boxing, including the safety of fighters. Among the WBC's innovations was the 1983 shortening of world championship fights from fifteen to twelve rounds, a move that was eventually adopted by the other sanctioning organizations. In 2003 the WBC filed for bankruptcy in an attempt to avoid paying \$30 million in damages from a lawsuit over questionable handling of title fight eligibility. The following year, the lawsuit was settled for a lesser amount, allowing the WBC to avoid having to disband and liquidate its assets.

### **International Boxing Federation**

Herb Goldman, in "Boxing Bodies: A Brief Chronology and Rundown", explains that the International Boxing Federation (IBF) was formed in 1983 by a group of WBA representatives upset with political machinations within that agency. Its creation was spearheaded by Robert W. Lee, the president of a smaller regional organization called the U.S. Boxing Association (USBA). The new group was originally called the IBFUSBA. In its first year of operation, the IBF remained fairly obscure. In 1984, however, the IBF decided to recognize as champions a number of high-profile fighters who were already established as other organizations' title holders, including Larry Holmes (1949–) and Marvin Hagler (1952–). When Holmes opted to relinquish his WBC title to accept the IBF's, it instantly gave the IBF the credibility it had previously lacked. The IBF's reputation took a major hit in 1999, when Lee was convicted on racketeering and other charges. It nevertheless remains one of professional boxing's major sanctioning bodies.

### **World Boxing Organization**

The World Boxing Organization (WBO) was formed in 1988 by a group of Puerto Rican and Dominican businessmen disenchanted with what they perceived as illegitimate rules and rating systems within the WBA. The WBO's first championship fight was a junior welter-weight championship match between Héctor Camacho (1962–) and Ray Mancini (1961–). The WBO achieved a level of legitimacy comparable to that of the WBA, the WBC, and the IBF, largely thanks to its recognition as champions of many of the sport's best-known competitors. The WBO has also tended at times to provide more opportunities for non-U.S.-based fighters than the other organizations. Even though the WBO was formed out of protest against allegedly corrupt practices,

it has certainly exhibited its share of inexplicable decisions that raise questions about the organization's integrity. In "New WBO Division: Dead Weight", Tim Graham notes that a particularly embarrassing example took place in 2001, when the WBO twice moved Darrin Morris (1966–2000) up in its super-middleweight rankings, even though he had fought only once in the past three years, and, more important, was dead.