

MARYLAND STATE ATHLETIC COMMISSION

MINUTES - WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2020

On Wednesday, August 19, 2020, the Maryland State Athletic Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman David Norman at 3:02 p.m.. Present were the following: Chairman Norman; Commissioner Chuck Gast; Commissioner Lenny Moore; Commissioner David Shull; Patrick Pannella, Executive Director; Eric London, Assistant Attorney General and Counsel; and Olga Escobar, Board Specialist. Absent: Commissioner Brian Boles. This was a virtual meeting due to COVID-19 pandemic public restrictions, with all Commission members and Commission staff calling in telephonically.

COMMISSION INVESTIGATION – WRESTLING PRACTICE SESSION

Executive Director provided the Commission with the following report in regard to a Commission investigation which was recently closed. The Commission received an anonymous complaint on August 14, 2020 concerning a professional wrestling activity described as a “wrestling practice session” and scheduled to occur on August 15, 2020 at the EWA Pain Factory in Dundalk, Maryland. The Commission contacted James “Jim” Hardwick, the promoter representative for licensed promoter EWA Promotions, LLC. Mr. Hardwick owns and operates the EWA Pain Factory, which operates as a professional wrestling school and training center.

Mr. Pannella advised Mr. Hardwick that a professional wrestling practice session may be held without Commission sanctioning provided that the Commission’s established policies for professional wrestling practice sessions taking place in a professional wrestling school or gym are maintained. The Commission determined that, because the wrestling practice session was going to be distributed for broadcasting purposes at a later point in time, its referenced policies for professional wrestling sessions were not being followed. The Commission construes any wrestling, boxing or MMA activity which is viewed by, or will be later viewed by, members of the public to be an event falling under Commission jurisdiction and requiring a Commission sanction.

Mr. Hardwick informed Mr. Pannella prior to the scheduled wrestling practice session that he, on behalf of EWA Promotions, LLC, would fully cooperate with the Commission and would refrain from broadcasting the wrestling practice session either live or at a point in time in the future. The Commission has received no information or communication contradicting Mr. Hardwick's expressed compliance in this matter.

“PROPOSED STATEMENT OF CLAIM PURSUANT TO THE MARYLAND TORT CLAIMS ACT” RECEIVED BY THE COMMISSION

As was reflected in the July 22, 2020 Commission minutes, Chairman Norman reported the following. The Commission received a “Proposed Statement of Claim Pursuant to the Maryland Tort Claims Act” from a legal entity representing the widow of professional boxer Maxim Dadashev. Following his boxing contest versus Subriel Matias which was sanctioned by the Commission and held on July 19, 2019 at The MGM National Harbor in Oxon Hill, Maryland, Mr. Dadashev was transported by ambulance to the hospital for neurosurgical intervention resulting from a traumatic brain injury. On July 23, 2019, Mr. Dadashev passed away.

COMMISSION DOCUMENT – “PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING EVENTS WITHOUT SPECTATORS – MEDICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROTOCOLS FOR COVID-19 TESTING”

The Commission conducted the following review of the Commission's newly-created document designed to address the COVID-19 pandemic and entitled “Professional Wrestling Events Without Spectators – Medical and Administrative Protocols for COVID-19 Testing”.

Chairman Norman reported that, since June of 2020 when the Commission was approached by licensed promoter Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC (“ROH”) to consider sanctioning a three-day series of ROH wrestling matches for television taping purposes and without spectators in attendance, the Commission has been “working diligently” with safety as its focus to prepare a Commission document specifically designed to set medical protocols and administrative protocols relative to COVID-19 testing for this scenario.

Commission Chief Physician Dr. John W. Stiller, M.D., Chairman Norman and Executive Director Pannella met virtually on a weekly basis for said purpose since ROH made its initial inquiry to the Commission. Dr. Stiller researched and reviewed the medical accuracy of COVID-19 tests while considering, and addressing, the marked fluidity of the COVID-19 virus. Chairman Norman and Mr. Pannella worked to obtain information concerning how both other athletic commissions and governing bodies representing other professional sports are addressing the COVID-19 virus and are implementing COVID-19 testing.

Chairman Norman recognized Dr. Sherry Wulkan, M.D. for her noteworthy contributions in reviewing, and opining on, the Commission's COVID-19 testing protocols for wrestling events without spectators.

Chairman Norman stated that this combined effort was a "great launching pad" for the Commission to move on to consider formulating COVID-19 testing protocols in the future for the sports of boxing and MMA.

The Commission instructed Mr. Pannella to inform other licensed promoters of the Commission's COVID-19 testing protocols for wrestling events without spectators.

Mr. Pannella applauded Chairman Norman and Dr. Stiller for their combined leadership efforts in enabling the Commission to effectively address the pandemic and to initiate the return of Commission-sanctioned events beginning with the regulation of wrestling events without a crowd attending.

Chairman Norman and Mr. Pannella commended the Maryland Sports Commission of the Maryland Stadium Authority for its noteworthy contributions in providing the Commission with timely information related to COVID-19 testing protocols being utilized by the governing bodies of other professional sports including baseball, basketball and soccer.

Mr. Pannella thanked Terry Hasseltine, Maryland Sports Commission Executive Director, for his interest in assisting the Commission in this endeavor.

The Maryland Department of Labor ("Department of Labor") approved the

referenced Commission COVID-19 testing protocols designed for wrestling events without spectators.

The Commission recognized Department of Labor Secretary Tiffany Robinson for her efforts in considering, and approving, these protocols.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Gast, seconded by Commissioner Shull, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the Commission's medical protocols and administrative protocols relative to COVID-19 testing for professional wrestling events being held without spectators in attendance.

COMMISSION UPDATE ON THREE-DAY SERIES OF ROH MATCHES FOR TELEVISION TAPING PURPOSES WITHOUT SPECTATORS IN ATTENDANCE

Executive Director Pannella led a Commission discussion concerning the Commission's regulatory planning for the three-day series of wrestling matches for television taping purposes without spectators in attendance being promoted by Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC ("ROH"), being sanctioned by the Commission and scheduled to be held from August 21 - 23, 2020 at The UMBC Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland.

Mr. Pannella discussed all established Commission procedures and requirements pertaining to administering COVID-19 testing, isolating wrestlers and referees at the hotel, performing physical examinations of wrestlers and referees at the hotel, enforcing social distancing both at the hotel and the venue, and supervising the ROH wrestling activity at the venue in compliance with Commission regulations.

Mr. Pannella reported that he has received the full cooperation of ROH representatives, and was confident that all respective safety measures will be strictly maintained and enforced through the combined efforts of both the Commission and the promoter.

SCHEDULED COMMISSION MEETINGS

The Commission held a discussion regarding future meeting dates to be held

virtually. The Commission agreed to hold the following meeting dates and times:

Wednesday, September 23, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.;

Wednesday, October 21, 2020 at 3:00 p.m..

Wednesday, November 18, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.; and

Wednesday, December 16, 2020 at 3:00 p.m..

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion by Commissioner Gast, and seconded by Commissioner Shull, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to adjourn the meeting at 3:26 p.m..

Patrick Pannella
Executive Director