

# **MARYLAND STATE ATHLETIC COMMISSION**

## **MINUTES - WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2020**

On Wednesday, May 20, 2020, the Maryland State Athletic Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman David Norman at 3:03 p.m.. Present were the following: Chairman Norman; Commissioner Brian Boles; Commissioner Charles “Chuck” Gast; Commissioner David Shull; Patrick Pannella, Executive Director; Olga Escobar, Board Specialist; and Eric London, Assistant Attorney General and Counsel. Absent: Commissioner Lenny Moore. This was a virtual meeting due to Covid-19 pandemic public restrictions, with all Commission members and Commission staff calling in telephonically.

### **PUBLIC ATTENDANCE**

Chairman Norman provided an overview of the public attendance requirements relative to COMAR 09.01.11.03 and the public being invited to attend and to observe any open session of units within the Maryland Department of Labor.

Chairman Norman reported that any member of the public is welcome to attend this virtual meeting telephonically by utilizing the call-in contact information listed on both the Commission webpage and Maryland Department of Labor public calendar.

### **SETTLEMENT OF CASE NO. MSAC-20-01 – CONSENT ORDERS**

Executive Director Pannella provided the following report with regard to the settlement of Case No. MSAC-20-01.

On December 13, 2019, during a match held as a part of professional wrestling event promoted by Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC (ROH) at The University of Maryland Baltimore County Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland, blood was introduced into the ring in direct violation of Commission regulations. Specifically, wrestlers Mark Haskins and Mark LaMonaco engaged in a wrestling match wherein Mr. LaMonaco lifted Mr. Haskins and threw him onto a wooden table laced with coils of barbed wire. Mr. Haskins suffered lacerations as a result of coming into contact with the barbed wire, and bled in several of the areas in which

he sustained lacerations.

In the days prior to the December 13, 2019 ROH event, ROH promoter representatives responsible for communicating with the Commission were reminded of, and fully advised by, the Commission of Commission regulations prohibiting the introduction of blood into the ring during a wrestling match. ROH promoter representatives stated to the Commission at the time that there were no plans to introduce blood into the ring during this wrestling event.

In the hour immediately preceding the start of the December 13, 2019 ROH wrestling event: (1) Mr. Pannella and Commission Inspector Stan Cheung dually interviewed all wrestlers participating in the wrestling event – including Mr. Haskins and Mr. LaMonaco – to ensure that no wrestlers were planning to introduce blood into the ring while performing in their respective wrestling matches later that evening; and (2) Both Mr. Haskins and Mr. LaMonaco stated to Mr. Pannella and Mr. Cheung that neither wrestler was planning to introduce blood into the ring while performing in their match.

ROH, Mr. Haskins and Mr. LaMonaco each agreed to enter into a respective consent order as a means of settling this case in the spirit of conciliation and cooperation and also in an effort to avoid litigation.

ROH stated that precautions were taken during this wrestling match to reduce the extent of potential injury by clipping the ends of the barbed wire. However, ROH acknowledged that blood was caused to be introduced into the ring during the match by contact with the plywood-barbed wire apparatus.

Commission regulations prohibit deliberately lacerating oneself or one's opponent, or, by any other means, introducing human blood or animal blood into the ring.

Commission regulations require a promoter to be responsible for the conduct of its representatives and employees, as well as to be responsible for conducting wrestling contests in a safe manner.

ROH consented to a Commission finding of, and the Commission found, a violation of Business Regulation Article §§ 4-310(a)(1)(iv) and (2), COMAR

09.14.08.03(F)(l)(m), and COMAR 09.14.08.06.

ROH, Mr. Haskins and Mr. LaMonaco each agreed to pay to the Commission a civil penalty in the amount of \$4,000,00, with each respondent paying \$2,000.00 within 30 days of the date of the corresponding consent order. Provided that each respondent does not engage in any conduct in violation of the Commission's applicable laws and regulations during the intervening 365 days after the date of the consent order, the Commission agrees to reduce the total civil penalty to the \$2,000.00 already paid by each respondent in the first referenced payment.

The Commission considers the actions it has taken in these three consent orders, and the requirements within, to be a deterrent to any future violations of a similar nature by this promoter or by these wrestlers.

Mr. Pannella pointed out Mr. Cheung's valuable contributions in assisting him with this Commission investigation.

### **SETTLEMENT OF CASE NO. MSAC-20-02 – CONSENT ORDER**

Executive Director Pannella provided the following report with regard to the settlement of Case No. MSAC-20-02.

On November 9, 2019, during a match held as a part of professional wrestling event promoted by All Elite Wrestling, LLC (AEW) at The Royal Farms Arena in Baltimore, Maryland, blood was introduced into the ring in direct violation of Commission regulations. Specifically, wrestlers Jonathan Good and Tyson Smith engaged in a wrestling match wherein both Mr. Good and Mr. Tyson repeatedly used certain foreign objects wrapped in barbed wire to strike, and to lacerate, each other.

In the days prior to the November 9, 2019 AEW event, the AEW promoter representative responsible for communicating with the Commission was fully advised by the Commission of Commission regulations prohibiting the introduction of blood into the ring during a wrestling match. The AEW promoter representative stated to the Commission at the time that there were no plans to introduce blood into the ring during any match held as a part of this wrestling event.

AEW agreed to enter into a consent order as a means of settling this case in the spirit of conciliation and cooperation and also in an effort to avoid litigation.

The Commission acknowledged that, while AEW took precautions to reduce the potential injury to both Mr. Good and Mr. Smith by using materials, in certain instances, to simulate injury and merely give the appearance of bleeding, blood was introduced into the ring in other instances during this professional wrestling match through the deliberate and repeated actions of the two referenced wrestlers as scripted by AEW.

Commission regulations prohibit physically dangerous conduct and deliberately lacerating oneself or one's opponent, or, by any other means, introducing human blood or animal blood into the ring.

Commission regulations require a promoter to be responsible for the conduct of its representatives and employees, as well as to be responsible for conducting wrestling contests in a safe manner.

AEW consented to a Commission finding of, and the Commission found, a violation of Business Regulation Article §§ 4-310(a)(1)(iv), COMAR 09.14.08.03(F)(1)(l), COMAR 09.14.08.03(F)(1)(m), and COMAR 09.14.08.06.

AEW accepted full responsibility for the planning of Mr. Good and Mr. Smith to introduce blood into the ring during their wrestling match.

AEW agreed to pay to the Commission a civil penalty in the amount of \$10,000.00 within 30 days of the date of the consent order.

The Commission considers the actions it has taken in this consent order, and the requirements within, to be a deterrent to any future violations of a similar nature by this promoter.

Mr. Pannella pointed out Commission Inspector Stan Cheung's valuable contributions in assisting him with this Commission investigation.

## **ADDRESSING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

The Commission held a discussion with regard to the effect of, and the impact of, the Covid-19 pandemic on the holding of boxing events, MMA events and professional wrestling events in the State of Maryland in the future.

Chairman Norman reported that Maryland Governor Larry Hogan's directive to protect public health and limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus in the state included a prohibition on mass gatherings such as Commission-sanctioned events.

The Commission noted that the health and safety of the fighters and wrestlers it regulates remains of paramount importance.

Executive Director Pannella stated that most promoters who had Commission-sanctioned events scheduled to occur when the Covid-19 pandemic began cancelled their events even before state restrictions were implemented.

The Commission expressed its intention to develop medical protocols and administrative protocols to address the Covid-19 pandemic as the Commission prepares for the point in time in the future when it will be permitted to regulate combative sports events and professional wrestling events.

Mr. Pannella reported that the Commission is sending all Commission members and Commission physicians a series of emails concerning the fluid medical developments in Covid-19 tests and Covid-19 testing as well as various regulatory or organizational actions taken in face of this virus. Mr. Pannella opined that such an ongoing exercise and corresponding research will be beneficial to the Commission as, under the leadership and direction of Commission Chief Physician Dr. John W. Stiller, M.D., it prepares to create the referenced protocols.

The Commission expressed its support of the email series communication which Mr. Pannella has implemented.

## **COMMISSION MEETING DATES**

The Commission held a discussion regarding future meeting dates. The

Commission agreed to hold the following meeting dates and times either as a virtual meeting if required or, if permissible, in the Third Floor Conference Room, 500 North Calvert Street in Baltimore, Maryland:

Wednesday, July 22, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.;  
Wednesday, August 19, 2020 at 3:00 p.m.; and  
Wednesday, September 23, 2020 at 3:00 p.m..

### **APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MINUTES**

Commission minutes for the Commission meeting held on February 19, 2020, which were previously distributed to Commission members for review, were discussed.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Boles, and seconded by Commissioner Shull, the Commission voted unanimously (3-0) to approve the February 19, 2020 minutes of the Commission.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

**Patrick Pannella**  
**Executive Director**