

# **MARYLAND STATE ATHLETIC COMMISSION**

## **MINUTES - WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2020**

On Wednesday, September 23, 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 Brian Boles; Commissioner Chuck Gast; Commissioner Lenny Moore; Commissioner David Shull; Greg Morgan, Commissioner, Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing, Maryland Department of Labor; Patrick Pannella, Executive Director; Eric London, Assistant Attorney General and Counsel; Olga Escobar, Board Specialist; and Joe Koff, promoter representative for Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC. This was a virtual meeting due to COVID-19 pandemic public restrictions, with all Commission members and Commission staff calling in telephonically.

### **APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MINUTES**

Commission minutes for the Commission meeting held on June 17, 2020, which were previously distributed to Commission members for review, were discussed. Upon a motion by Commissioner Gast, and seconded by Commissioner Shull, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the June 17, 2020 minutes of the Commission.

Commission minutes for the Commission meeting held on July 22, 2020, which were previously distributed to Commission members for review, were discussed. Upon a motion by Commissioner Gast, and seconded by Commissioner Shull, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the July 22, 2020 minutes of the Commission.

Commission minutes for the Commission meeting held on August 19, 2020, which were previously distributed to Commission members for review, were discussed. Upon a motion by Commissioner Gast, and seconded by Commissioner Shull, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the August 19, 2020 minutes of the Commission.

### **WELCOMING COMMISSIONER GREG MORGAN**

The Commission welcomed Commissioner Greg Morgan, who was recently appointed as Commissioner of the Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing (“O&P”) within the Maryland Department of Labor (“Labor”).

Chairman Norman congratulated Commissioner Morgan on obtaining his new position. Chairman Norman reported that he, along with the other respective Chairpersons from the various boards and commissions within O&P, recently met virtually with Labor Secretary Tiffany Robinson and were formally introduced to Commissioner Morgan.

Chairman Norman stated that, when the pandemic ends and the Commission’s regulation of boxing, MMA and wrestling events resumes at full capacity, he invites Commissioner Morgan to attend a boxing event or MMA event and observe the Commission’s staff at work. Chairman Norman noted that the Commission maintains its high safety standards at Commission-sanctioned events through the dedicated efforts of its experienced staff of physicians, referees, judges and inspectors.

Counsel London welcomed Commissioner Morgan and wished him well in his new position.

Commissioner Morgan thanked the Commission for the “warm welcome” and expressed his strong desire, moving forward, to fully support the mission and work of the Commission. He encouraged Commission members to feel free to contact him if he can ever be of assistance in any way.

Commissioner Morgan noted that he recently met individually with Executive Director Pannella to gain an introduction into the Commission, commenting on the passion and enthusiasm which Mr. Pannella exhibits for his job and the sports the Commission regulates.

Mr. Pannella referenced the Commission as a team, opining that the Commission’s high safety standards are a direct reflection of the combined exemplary efforts of Commission members and Commission staff alike.

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

Chairman Norman informed Commissioner Morgan of the following information reported in the minutes of two previously held Commission meetings. 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 REVIEW OF THREE-DAY SERIES OF TAPED  
ROH WRESTLING MATCHES HELD WITHOUT SPECTATORS  
FROM AUGUST 21 - 23, 2020 AT THE UMBC EVENTS CENTER**

Executive Director Pannella provided the Commission with the following review of the three-day series of taped wrestling matches without spectators which was promoted by licensed promoter Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC (“ROH”), sanctioned by the Commission, and held on August 21 - 23, 2020 at The UMBC Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland.

Mr. Pannella reported that the level of cooperation and communication which ROH demonstrated in working with the Commission to fully maintain all of the Commission’s required medical and administrative protocols for COVID-19 testing for wrestling events without spectators was “outstanding”.

Mr. Pannella opined that the COVID-19 testing process as defined in the Commission’s COVID-19 testing protocols, which included all wrestlers, referees and Commission representatives to be tested on three separate occasions and everyone else entering the venue to be tested on two separate occasions, went very smoothly.

Mr. Pannella reported that, after all respective COVID-19 tests of those entering the

venue were completed and all required Commission written post-event health questionnaires were completed by participating wrestlers and referees and were returned to the Commission, no one was reported as having tested positive for the COVID-19 virus and no wrestler or referee reported after the event had concluded as having any contact with anyone who tested positive for the virus.

Mr. Pannella discussed the various scenarios wherein the established Commission procedures and requirements pertaining to administering COVID-19 testing were implemented and utilized. He explained that these scenarios included wrestlers and referees being isolated at the hotel, physical examinations of wrestlers and referees being performed at the hotel, social distancing enforced both at the hotel and at the venue, and the supervision of the ROH wrestling activity at the venue in compliance with Commission regulations.

Mr. Pannella reported that, in each referenced scenario, the Commission received the strong support of ROH representatives which resulted in all respective safety measures contained in the Commission's COVID-19 testing protocols to be strictly maintained.

Mr. Pannella specifically recognized the supportive efforts of ROH representatives Joe Koff, Gary Juster and Ian King as well as Commission inspector Stan Cheung and Commission physician Dr. Craig Fisher, D.O..

Mr. Pannella also recognized Matthew Jones, Director of Sales of the Doubletree by Hilton Baltimore-BWI Airport Hotel -- the hotel where the ROH wrestlers and referees were staying and were isolated. Mr. Pannella stated that Mr. Jones took constructive steps at his hotel to ensure that every wrestler and referee remained sequestered in a clean environment while having close access to hand sanitizers and disinfectant wipes.

### **ROH REPRESENTATIVE JOE KOFF ADDRESSES COMMISSION / COMMISSION RESPONSE**

Joe Koff, promoter representative for licensed promoter Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC ("ROH"), addressed the Commission and expressed the following.

Mr. Koff stated that, while he has experienced many “high moments” during his long tenure with ROH, conducting the three-day series of taped ROH wrestling matches on August 21 - 23, 2020 at The UMBC Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland was one of the most significant achievements for the ROH brand and a “highlight” of Mr. Koff’s career.

Mr. Koff described the strong working relationship and “partnership” forged between ROH and the Commission, which he notes resulted in holding this wrestling activity and “setting the responsible standard for the [wrestling] industry”.

Mr. Koff remarked that the Commission fully understood, and responded to, the specific needs of ROH by creating safe medical and administrative protocols for COVID-19 testing and by sanctioning the referenced ROH wrestling event.

Mr. Koff expressed ROH’s desire to hold a two-day series of wrestling matches held on October 16 - 17, 2020 at The UMBC Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland.

Mr. Koff advised that ROH is requesting for the wrestlers and referees participating in the next ROH wrestling event to have access to the ROH dojo facility for one day immediately prior to the event to engage in television interview “spots” and training for matches.

Mr. Koff opined that, were the Commission to approve ROH’s request to expand the wrestlers’ and referees’ isolation “bubble” to include the ROH dojo facility in the manner described, ROH would carry out its responsibilities relative to this Commission action “as cautiously and as diligently as everything else we have done”.

Mr. Koff also advised that this wrestling activity would be expanded to include one half of the ROH roster of wrestlers and referees, noting further that one of the wrestlers who will be working is from Canada and would be undergoing the first required COVID-19 test in Canada if the Commission so permits.

Mr. Koff explained that the corridor located on the upper level of the venue would

be utilized for dressing purposes in lieu of the limited number of dressing rooms located on the lower level of the venue, utilized for the August 21 - 23, 2020 ROH wrestling event.

Executive Director Pannella opined that Commission Chief Physician Dr. John W. Stiller, M.D. would not be opposed to such an arrangement as Dr. Stiller and Mr. Pannella recommended that the corridor of the venue be utilized in such a manner when the August 21 - 23, 2020 ROH wrestling event was originally being planned.

Chairman Norman opined that the August 21 - 23, 2020 ROH wrestling event, the first Commission-sanctioned event held after the Commission established its medical and administrative protocols for COVID-19 testing for wrestling events without spectators in attendance, was “very successful” as ROH “adhered to the safety standard set by the Commission”.

Chairman Norman conveyed the Commission’s appreciation to Mr. Koff for ROH’s noted cooperation in “essentially [helping to] establish” the Commission’s referenced protocols.

Chairman Norman stated that, because the August 21 - 23, 2020 ROH wrestling event was such a “safe and successful” operation on all relevant fronts from start to finish, the Commission is open to considering the ROH’s request to expand the isolation “bubble” for wrestlers and referees participating in the next ROH wrestling event.

Commissioner Boles conveyed his appreciation for the “depth” of the information provided by the Commission relative to how the Commission’s medical and administrative protocols for COVID-19 testing were implemented for the August 21 - 23, 2020 ROH wrestling event.

Commissioner Moore voiced his support of the Commission’s medical and administrative protocols for COVID-19 testing implemented for the August 21 - 23, 2020 ROH wrestling event.

Commissioner Gast voiced his support of the Commission’s efforts in trying “to move forward” by developing medical and administrative protocols for COVID-19

testing and by sanctioning the August 21 - 23, 2020 ROH wrestling event.

Commissioner Gast expressed his concern regarding COVID-19 testing procedures related to the ROH wrestler who will be travelling from Canada to participate in the next ROH wrestling event. Commissioner Gast inquired as what steps the Commission will be taking to ensure that the COVID-19 testing process relative to this individual undergoing the first required test while in Canada is acceptable to the Commission.

Mr. Pannella responded that the Commission would address such a scenario in the same manner that it accepts certain blood tests for boxers and MMA contestants performed in Canada and in other countries. Mr. Pannella explained that Dr. Stiller would be responsible for first ensuring, from a medical standpoint, that the laboratory based in Canada responsible for administering the referenced COVID-19 test for the ROH wrestler in question was properly accredited and that the correct test was being utilized prior to the Commission accepting the wrestler's test results.

Commissioner Shull noted that the Commission is trying to do "everything that it can do" from a regulatory perspective to maintain high safety standards while helping ROH to be able to still run successful wrestling events during the current pandemic.

### **COMMISSION MEDICAL PROTOCOLS AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROTOCOLS FOR COVID-19 TESTING FOR PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING EVENTS WITHOUT SPECTATORS**

Executive Director Pannella provided the Commission with a report concerning how the Commission's medical protocols and administrative protocols established for COVID-19 testing for professional wrestling events being held without spectators in attendance were effectively utilized for the three-day series of taped wrestling matches without spectators which was promoted by licensed promoter Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC ("ROH"), sanctioned by the Commission, and held on August 21 - 23, 2020 at The UMBC Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland.

Chairman Norman stated that, based on the successful utilization and outcome of

the use of the Commission's referenced medical protocols and administrative protocols for the August 21 - 23, 2020 ROH wrestling event, the Commission will be developing and considering protocols for boxing and MMA events without spectators.

Mr. Pannella opined that, while there is a question as to whether a venue is either currently available or available in the near future in the State of Maryland to hold boxing and MMA events without spectators, developing such protocols as Chairman Norman referenced will be very useful as the Commission prepares for the point in time when the pandemic ends and the Commission returns to sanctioning and regulating events in typical, routine fashion. Mr. Pannella added that he is actively reaching out to venues across Maryland to inquire if a boxing event or MMA event could potentially be held at this time without spectators in attendance.

**REQUEST FOR COMMISSION SANCTIONING -  
TWO-DAY SERIES OF TAPED ROH WRESTLING MATCHES  
TO BE HELD WITHOUT SPECTATORS FROM  
OCTOBER 16 - 17, 2020 AT THE UMBC EVENTS CENTER**

The Commission held a discussion in response to the formal request made by licensed promoter Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC ("ROH") for Commission sanctioning of a two-day series of taped wrestling matches being held without spectators in attendance on October 16 - 17, 2020 at The UMBC Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland.

The Commission reiterated that, in regard to the August 21 - 23, 2020 ROH wrestling event:

- (1) all respective COVID-19 tests were completed by participating wrestlers and referees;
- (2) all required Commission written post-event health questionnaires were completed by wrestlers and referees and were returned to the Commission;
- (3) no one was reported as having tested positive for the COVID-19 virus; and

(4) no wrestler or referee reported after the event had concluded as having any contact with anyone who tested positive for the virus.

The Commission, after reviewing the matter with Commission Chief Physician Dr. John W. Stiller, M.D. and in reference to the October 16 - 17, 2020 ROH wrestling event, determined that:

(1) if the ROH dojo facility is not utilized for one day of television interviews and wrestling training, the third COVID-19 test as defined in the Commission's medical and administrative protocols for COVID-19 testing for wrestling events without spectators in attendance will not be required; and

(2) if the ROH dojo facility is utilized for one day of television interviews and wrestling training, all ROH wrestlers and referees, Commission representatives, and anyone else entering the ROH dojo facility will be required to undergo the referenced third COVID-19 test.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Gast, and seconded by Commissioner Shull, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve sanctioning of a two-day series of taped wrestling matches without spectators in attendance being promoted by ROH, being held on October 16 - 17, 2020 at The UMBC Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland, and featuring up to one half of the current ROH roster of wrestlers with the understanding that:

(1) if the ROH dojo facility is not utilized for one day of television interviews and wrestling training, the third COVID-19 test as defined in the Commission's medical and administrative protocols for COVID-19 testing for wrestling events without spectators in attendance will not be required; and

(2) if the ROH dojo facility is utilized for one day of television interviews and wrestling training, all ROH wrestlers and referees, Commission representatives, and anyone else entering the ROH dojo facility will be required to undergo the referenced third COVID-19 test.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Upon a motion by Commissioner Shull, and seconded by Commissioner Gast, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to adjourn the meeting at 3:40 p.m..

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