

Written evidence submitted by Safe MMA

Safe MMA - Submission to the DCMS Concussion in Sport Inquiry

Our Submission

We are entering this submission to the DCMS Concussion in Sport Inquiry:

- to document the voluntary lengths taken by stakeholders of the UK MMA (mixed martial arts) community to mitigate medical risk in MMA competition.
- to describe a model of third-party, medical governance that is unique and effective.
- to document the challenges to safeguarding the medical safety of MMA's participants in an unregulated sports environment.

Who We Are and What We Do

Safe MMA is a globally renowned medical charity based in the UK and dedicated to the safety of athletes competing at MMA (mixed martial arts) events. In the absence of sport regulation, it was founded in 2012 by medical experts together with representatives from the MMA community, establishing the first minimum, medical safety standard for the sport in the UK and Ireland.

Safe MMA provides independent medical screening, public record-keeping services and the provision of advice and information on medical conditions to athletes, who are its members. Safe MMA's medical board and panel consist of volunteer doctors and medical professionals with no commercial connection to promoters and includes world-class expertise from international sport. The athletes pay a small membership fee to Safe MMA and there is no commercial arrangement between the charity and the promoter, but in absence of external regulation, the promoter acts as the enforcer of the protocol. By mutual agreement, promoters adhering to the Safe MMA standard commit to not engaging competitors during their medical suspension periods (prescribed by a ringside doctor) which are made publicly available.

Safe MMA is partnered with mixed martial arts governing bodies that include the International Mixed Martial Arts Federation (IMMAF), the Irish Mixed Martial Arts Association (IMMAA) and EMMAA (English Mixed Martial Arts Association). The charity also partners with a host of commercial British and Irish promoters, and international promoters when they bring events to the UK, such as Bellator (USA) and KSW (Poland).

Preclearance Medical Requirements of MMA Competitors

MMA promoters, governing bodies and event organisers partnering with Safe MMA demand the submission of the following medical examination documentation (at minimum) from their athletes, for independent auditing and record-keeping by Safe MMA:

- Blood tests (Hep B, Hep C and HIV) within 6 months
- Physical examination within 1 year
- Pre- and post- bout medical suspensions from the ringside doctor

Larger event organisers and all MMA promoters in Ireland, additionally require:

- Dilated Pupil Eye Examination from within 1 year
- MRA Brain Scan (once ever)
- MRI Brain Scan from within 3 years (or 1 year in Ireland)

Concussion Suspensions

Safe MMA manages the medical suspension records post-event on advice from the ringside doctor, with automatic, mandatory, tiered suspension periods applied for first and second incidences of concussion of head trauma. On the third incidence the competitor will be indefinitely suspended until they are neurologically cleared.

Medical Team

Our core, volunteer medical team includes:

- Dr. Mike Loosemore MBE (UK) - Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games Chief Medical Officer; former Team Doctor GB boxing
- Dr. Maeve Rodgers (UK) - GP and Ringside Physician
- Prof. Dan Healy (Ireland) – Consultant Neurologist
- Dr David Wang (USA) – Medical Director and Director of sports medicine at Quinnipiac University; University of Connecticut Health Assistant professor, Department of Orthopaedics
- Dr. Jack Kreindler - Director of Health Optimisation at the Centre of Health and Human Performance; specialist in extreme sports medicine
- Dr Ashok Adams (UK) - Consultant Head and Neck / Neuroradiologist
- Dr. Russell Young (UK) – Consultant Radiologist
- Dr. Safiyah Ahsan (UK) - GP and Sports Doctor
- Dr. Alan Sweeney (UK) - Consultant in Sports and Exercise Medicine
- Dr. Sarah Frewin (UK) - Consultant in Emergency Medicine
- Dr. Duncan Redmill (UK) - Consultant in Emergency Medicine

The core team invariably enlists expert advice from a wide range of GPs, medical specialists (on more complex cases), ringside doctors and medical service providers in the U.K. and abroad, for a 360-degree view of a competitor's specific health needs.

Environmental Challenges

Lack of regulation of the sport of MMA means that compliance is voluntary and only a minority of MMA promoters in the United Kingdom work with Safe MMA. There remains no legal requirement for a minimum level of medical safety either for athlete preclearance or at events in combat sports.

Meanwhile, the Safe MMA standard has become the de facto standard in the Republic of Ireland (with some variations to that in the UK), where it has become required of MMA promoters by arenas and licensing authorities and enforced by the MMA community itself through the Irish Mixed Martial Arts Association, despite the sport not being formally recognised by the Ministry of Sport.

Here, lack of sport recognition by Sport England creates further risk: Many medical professionals and medical service providers will not engage with MMA competitors or participants, making the sport less safe and in some instances, causing distress. Indeed, it has taken years to build up a network of doctors and scanning

clinics that are willing to see our athletes, and many still have to travel great distances for their medical examinations at some expense.

If you would like any further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Marc Goddard
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On behalf of Safe MMA's Trustees