

MARYLAND STATE ATHLETIC COMMISSION

MINUTES - WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2020

On Wednesday, October 21, 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 (“O&P”), Maryland Department of Labor; John Papavasiliou, Deputy Commissioner, O&P, 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 September 23, 2020, which were previously distributed to Commission members for review, were discussed. Upon a motion by Commissioner Shull, and seconded by Commissioner Gast, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the September 23, 2020 minutes of the Commission.

COMMISSION INVESTIGATION – ALLEGED ILLEGAL, UNSANCTIONED WRESTLING EVENT BOWLEYS QUARTERS / MIDDLE RIVER, MARYLAND

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 October 6, 2020 concerning a professional wrestling activity described as wrestling matches scheduled to occur on October 10, 2020 at a residence in the Bowleys Quarters community of Middle River, Maryland. The complaint also referenced a similar wrestling activity allegedly held at the same

residence on September 19, 2020.

The Commission conducted research on the internet concerning this matter. The Commission also communicated with Precinct 11 of the Baltimore County Police Department concerning the same.

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. Because a homeowner may be unaware of the Commission's sanctioning requirement and enforcement of the same, it is customary for the Commission to first seek to inform the property owner of pertinent Commission regulations in relation to how one can obtain a promoter license from the Commission to hold wrestling events which: (1) are sanctioned by the Commission; and (2) conform to established Commission health and safety standards.

The Commission was unable to locate a telephone number or an email address for the homeowner of this residence. Consequently, the Commission prepared written correspondence addressed to the homeowner which Mr. Pannella hand-delivered to the residence on October 9, 2020. Mr. Pannella presented the Commission correspondence to the adult son of the homeowner, who answered the door of the residence.

The Commission received confirmation that no wrestling activity occurred on October 10, 2020 at the residence in question. Since then, the Commission has received no information or communication contradicting the referenced homeowner's full compliance in this matter.

Mr. Pannella recognized Lieutenant Joseph Jamerson and Lieutenant Scott Huff, both affiliated with Precinct 11 of the Baltimore County Police Department, for their combined cooperation with this Commission investigation.

Mr. Pannella noted that, since this investigation has concluded, the Commission received verbal feedback from several licensed promoters who expressed their strong support of the Commission's ongoing efforts to prevent such illegal, unsanctioned wrestling events from occurring.

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

Executive Director Pannella provided the Commission with the following review of the two-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 October 16 - 17, 2020 at The University of Maryland Baltimore County (“UMBC”) Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland.

Mr. Pannella noted that, similar to the ROH wrestling event held in the State of Maryland on August 21 - 23, 2020 at the same venue, 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 “once again outstanding”.

Chairman Norman remarked that it was “gratifying to hear that ROH was so cooperative, which speaks to both the efficacy of the Maryland State Athletic Commission’s protocols and how well run ROH wrestling events are.”

For this wrestling event, the Commission made certain changes to the type of COVID-19 tests utilized in response to the fluid nature of the virus and recent testing developments. The goal of the Commission in this aspect was to continue to maintain the Commission’s high standard of COVID-19 testing while at the same time seeking to reduce the promoter’s testing costs as much as possible.

The location of the wrestler’s rooms changed from the wrestling event held in August, 2020. Due to the larger number of wrestlers scheduled to work, anticipated to be up to 35 wrestlers, the decision was made to place wrestler’s dressing rooms in the outer second floor hallway of the venue. This was a plan which Dr. John W. Stiller, M.D., Commission Chief Physician, and Mr. Pannella had initially recommended be utilized when ROH was planning its August, 2020 wrestling event.

Space was allotted for every two wrestlers to be situated in an area 16 feet wide and to be separated along the sides with pipe and draping. The two wrestlers shared a six-foot table on which to place their respective belongings at each end of the table.

A blue piece of duct tape was placed on the floor and down the middle of each space, marking an area of eight feet on each side which identified the respective area each wrestler was to occupy. A narrow walkway in front of these dressing room areas was utilized by the wrestlers who were working as well as Commission representatives.

Mr. Pannella opined that the wrestlers' dressing rooms worked extremely well in terms of enforcing all Commission social distancing requirements and enabling Commission representatives to easily, and effectively, monitor the same.

Mr. Pannella recognized Tiffany Sun, General Manager of The UMBC Events Center, for her noteworthy efforts in ensuring that the wrestlers' dressing rooms met all Commission social distancing requirements.

As approved by the Commission at its October 21, 2020 Commission meeting, ROH was granted special permission for this wrestling event to expand the isolation and sequestering of wrestlers and referees to include utilizing a designated wrestling "dojo" gym for a period of one day or less. This allowed these participants to practice in a ring and to engage in taped interviews for television purposes. While the Commission had stipulated that all wrestlers and referees, Commission representatives, and anyone else entering the gym would be required to undergo the third COVID-19 test defined in updated Commission COVID-19 protocols as the rapid response test, ROH elected to have everyone entering the building undergo this additional test.

In keeping with the Commission position that contact tracing is essential to reducing the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the required Commission written post-event health questionnaires were completed by all participating wrestlers and referees and were returned to the Commission in the required time frame.

Mr. Pannella reported that the Commission representatives who worked at this wrestling activity in various capacities were intensely focused on ensuring that all

respective safety measures contained in the Commission's COVID-19 testing protocols were strictly maintained. Mr. Pannella recognized Commission Inspector Stan Cheung and Commission physician Dr. Ronald E. Miller, M.D. for their efforts in this regard.

Commissioner Greg Morgan attended a portion of the first day of this ROH wrestling activity. Commissioner Morgan toured the venue with Mr. Pannella and Mr. Cheung -- visiting the wrestlers' dressing rooms, speaking with several wrestlers and a referee about their personal experiences with the Commission's COVID-19 testing protocols, and observing several wrestling matches.

Mr. Pannella noted that, after completing a required COVID-19 test at the hotel where wrestlers and referees are being isolated, Commissioner Morgan introduced him to Michael Pound. Mr. Pound, who was also undergoing the required testing at the time, is the Director of Environmental Safety and Health at UMBC. Mr. Pound expressed his support of the Commission's COVID-19 protocols, and also offered to be of assistance in expanding the lines of communication between UMBC and the Commission.

Commissioner Morgan remarked that he was very impressed by the Commission's high safety standards reflected in the regulation of this wrestling activity by Commission representatives. Commissioner Morgan commended Mr. Pannella on his efforts in support of this endeavor, and congratulated the Commission on its exemplary teamwork in serving the needs of its licensees.

The Commission commended Commissioner Morgan for his strong interest in, and hands-on support of, the Commission's efforts in regulating wrestling events without spectators in attendance.

As he had done previously relative to the August, 2020 ROH wrestling event, Mr. Pannella 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 once again 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.

The Baltimore Sun published an article on October 21, 2020 describing ROH wrestlers' experiences in the isolation "bubble" while noting the protocols for COVID-19 testing for wrestling events without spectators imposed by the Commission.

Referring to the referenced article, Mr. Pannella noted that the Commission was pleased to take the initial steps to assist a licensed promoter — and the licensed wrestlers it employs — in getting back to work during the pandemic in a safe and closely-monitored manner.

MODIFYING COMMISSION MEDICAL PROTOCOLS AND ADMINISTRATIVE PROTOCOLS FOR COVID-19 TESTING FOR BOXING EVENTS AND MMA EVENTS WITHOUT SPECTATORS

Chairman Norman stated that the next step in the Commission's regulatory plan to effectively serve its licensees during the pandemic is to modify its medical protocols and administrative protocols for COVID-19 testing relative to holding boxing events and MMA events without spectators.

Mr. Pannella reported that the Commission is currently working on developing these referenced protocols, adding that he is continuing to actively reach 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.

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, January 20, 2021 at 3:00 p.m..
Wednesday, February 17, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.; and
Wednesday, March 24, 2021 at 3:00 p.m..

ADJOURNMENT

Upon a motion by Commissioner Gast, and seconded by Commissioner Boles, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to adjourn the meeting at 3:30 p.m..

Patrick Pannella
Executive Director