

Dr. Margaret Goodman addresses the UFC



Calling on the UFC to Step Up Drug Testing

I first met Lorenzo Fertitta in 1996 when he became a commissioner with the Nevada State Athletic Commission. To date, there has never been a commissioner more knowledgeable and concerned about the health and welfare of the fighters, other than Dr. Flip Homansky, who succeeded Fertitta in 2000. After leaving the commission, Fertitta studied every aspect of MMA. Before purchasing the organization in 2001, Homansky and I traveled to a New Orleans UFC card with Fertitta and Dana White to help them explore needed improvements. They wanted a safe UFC as much as a successful UFC.

When the NSAC licensed MMA in 2001, I was a ring physician. I lectured before the Association of Boxing Commissions, along with the UFC, to help commissions understand the sport's new safety measures. Although different than boxing, fighters in both sports are subject to serious injury—both chronic and acute.

In 2001, Homansky convinced the NSAC to test for anabolic steroids and masking agents. The Commission initially doubted the need. It soon became clear that all weight classes were turning to PEDs and usage was greater in MMA. Like boxing, the long term and short term risks to the MMA athletes are too great to allow cheating.

Fertitta has been quoted numerous times that MMA has a PED problem. White has stated he doesn't want cheaters in their organization. It's an admirable first step for the UFC to test prospective fighters before they are signed. I am in favor of testing in foreign jurisdictions that have no regulatory body overseeing UFC bouts, and I am thankful they support commissions that already test.

Sadly, these measures remain inadequate. The substance panels are antiquated to catch cheaters. Employing announced testing times, organization might as well send up a flare to inform athletes when to stop their drugs.

The UFC owners, brilliant and savvy businessmen, understand this. This awareness must come with fear—the fear that a real PED testing program, recommended by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), Drug Free Sport, the Voluntary Ant-Doping Association (VADA) and others, would eliminate a portion of their roster.

When Muhammad “King Mo” Lawal recently tested positive for anabolic steroids, MMA competitor Shawn McCorkle proposed to MMAFighting.com writer Mike Chiapetta that PED testing be stopped. McCorkle noted, “What you end up with is a situation of where the guys who are beating the test, where the guys who can afford to get a doctor to prescribe whatever they want, where the guys who have access to stuff, they have an unfair advantage already... I think we’d be pretty naïve to think that every person who’s ever taken anything was caught...”

I understand McCorkle’s perspective given current athletic commission and UFC testing procedures. If they are not serious in diminishing PED usage, stopping cheating, protecting the health of the competitors and maintaining public confidence that fights are fair, then yes, stop testing.

The UFC’s success makes full scale testing feasible. This means handing it over to an independent party who can provide a WADA-approved laboratory, certified doping collectors and comprehensive testing panels. Currently, MMA athletes are never tested for blood doping, HGH, short-acting testosterone (which most cheats use these days). The testing has to be unannounced—where the fighters are given no more than one hour of notice to undergo examination of blood and urine.

VADA educates MMA competitors and boxers about PEDs. It enables athletes to demonstrate their commitment to clean sport by volunteering for testing. Respected boxers, Andre Berto and Victor Ortiz are VADA fighters. Boxing promoters Lou DiBella, Richard Schaefer and Joe DeGuardia are not afraid to see their fighters participate in a rigorous drug testing program. Floyd Mayweather Jr. remains an advocate for clean sport.

The UFC professes that MMA can hold its own against any sport. If true, then why are boxers the only professional combat sports athletes in the world willing to undergo stringent PED exams? Yes, this isn’t free; it isn’t cheap, but it is the right thing.

Margaret Goodman MD

Voluntary Anti-Doping Association President

www.VADA-testing.org