

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

For Immediate Release
April 21, 2004

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TAEKWONDO RULES POSE UNACCEPTABLE RISKS FOR CHILDREN

Washington, DC — Today Rep. Henry A. Waxman, Rep. Jesse L. Jackson, Jr., and Sen. James M. Jeffords wrote letters to the U.S. Olympic Committee expressing their concerns about a rule change in taekwondo that awards points to 12- and 13-year-old black belts for disabling their opponents with blows to the head. The members urged the Olympic Committee to undertake a full review.

“Young teens have an elevated risk of concussion and more serious forms of brain injury,” said Rep. Waxman. “A rule that encourages children to knock each other out is dangerous and needs to be reconsidered.”

“In my experience, encouraging 12- and 13-year olds to use disabling kicks to the head is not necessary for training, could cause real physical harm, and violates the spirit of taekwondo,” said Rep. Jackson, a black belt in taekwondo. “Most T.K.D. schools across the country begin classes with a student creed that includes words like ‘confidence,’ ‘knowledge,’ ‘honesty,’ ‘strength,’ ‘friendship,’ and ‘community.’ The rule change for 12- and 13-year olds runs contrary to the values and spirit of taekwondo as taught to young people across the country.”

In a separate letter, Sen. Jeffords, a black belt in taekwondo, wrote, “Taekwondo can be dangerous and can pose especially large risks to young teens because of their susceptibility to head injuries. I’m sure you would agree that the rules must provide the maximum protection possible to children. This rule change does not appear to meet this standard. According to sports medicine specialists, the new rule could lead to serious physical injury to 12- and 13-year olds.”

Scientific studies have shown that young athletes in taekwondo competitions suffer a rate of concussion three times greater than the rate among college football players. Taekwondo has the highest concussion rate for girls of any sport.

Because of such risks, U.S. youths younger than 14 used to compete under rules that penalized competitors for striking their opponent’s head with force. Now these important safeguards no longer apply. New rules that became effective in 2002 give younger black belts points for every blow to the head and a victory for disabling their opponent.

The U.S. Olympic Committee has the congressionally mandated role of overseeing Olympic sports, including the decisions of the United States Taekwondo Association regarding rules for competition. The letters to the Committee are available at www.house.gov/reform/min.