



May 19, 2004

Congressman Henry A. Waxman
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Congressman Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator James M. Jeffords
United States Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Congressmen Waxman and Jackson and Senator Jeffords,

I am writing in reference to the letter that you sent April 21, 2004 to United States Olympic Committee ("USOC") Acting President Bill Martin concerning a 2002 United States Taekwondo Union ("USTU") rule change regarding the ability of "12 and 13 year old black belts to disable their opponents with kicks to the head." Because I am the CEO of the USTU, but also a USOC employee, Bill Martin has asked that I respond to your letters.

We read your letters and understand your concerns and would like to address them and at the same time provide clarification as to where the USTU stands on this important issue. On May 13, 2004 the USTU Governance and Management committee met and voted to prohibit head contact for athletes under 14 years of age, regardless of belt color.

First and foremost, enclosed you will find the following information to provide you with a historical and a present day perspective of this rule change, they are:

- June 22 & 23, 2001 USTU Mid-Year Meeting Minutes - Discussion Point 8.4 National Events Proposal, p.15.
- December 19, 2001 Memo to Sang Chul Lee, Former USTU President, Eui Bin Lee, Former USTU Referee Chairman, Dae Sung Lee, Former Junior Olympic Committee Chairman, Tom Hernandez, USTU Tournament Chairman and Jay Warwick, Former USTU Executive Director, from Christine Simmons, Former USTU Administrative Director, Subject: Head Contact Revisions received on December 18, 2001.

- January 27, 2002 Memo to USTU Board of Governors – Head Contact Rule - USTU Web Site – <http://www.ustu.org>
- January 31, 2002 Memo to USTU Board of Governors from Eui Bin Lee, Former, USTU Referee Chairman, Subject: Head Contact Rule.
- February 18, 2002 Letter to Sang Chul Lee, Former USTU President, from Thomas E. Kinley, Barrington, IL. Subject: Recent USTU Rule Changes Regarding Head Contact.
- Memo to USTU Board of Governors From Eui Bin Lee, Former, USTU Referee Chairman, Junior Competition Rules.
- March 11, 2002 Memo Jeanna Mendoza, Senior Manager of Sports Programs, Subject: Junior Safety Rules Changes.
- March 29, 2002 Memo to USTU Board of Governors Eui Bin Lee, Former, USTU Referee Chairman, Junior Competition Rules.
- April 2, 2002 Memo to USTU Board of Governors Eui Bin Lee, Former, USTU Referee Chairman, Junior Competition Rules (Modification to March 29, 2002 letter).
- May 23, 2002 USTU Mid-Year Meeting Minutes Discussion Point 6.2 Head Contact at the Junior Olympics, p. 20, 31-32.
- September 26, 2002 letter from Jin Song Chung, Former USTU Chairman of Operations to Mr. Soon Ho Kim, Former USTU Secretary General, RE: Board of Governors' November, 2002 Meeting – Agenda Item (Junior Gyoroggi Weight Divisions). Copied to Sang Chul Lee (Former USTU President and Mr. Bruce Harris, Former USTU Executive Director).
- Research Paper - Patricia Bare-Grounds, USTU Medical Coordinator and USTU Medical Committee Chairperson.
- Junior Competition Rules of the USTU(USTU Referee Seminar Textbook, p. 101 – 104).
- 2004 USTU Membership Application. Also on the USTU Website.
- USTU Referee Seminar Textbook (April 2004).

- Curriculum vitae of Ms. Trish Bare-Grounds, USTU Medical Coordinator and USTU Medical Committee Chairperson.
- Letter from World Taekwondo Federation Letter, April 29, 2004. Kum Hong Lee, Secretary General.

As you may be aware the USTU has had a history of governance, financial and administrative irregularities. In February 2004 the USOC stepped in and installed me as CEO (USOC employee on loan) to take over the day to day operations of the USTU. In addition, the USOC named a five member USTU Governance and Management to rebuild the current Governance structure. There are many issues that we have uncovered from the last administration and we are working diligently to address them as we speak.

In reference to the questions in your letter, we have answered them to the best of our knowledge based on communications with present and former USTU members and staff and the USTU files.

"Why was the age of 12 chosen for an acceptable age for full sparring?"

In the events leading up to the proposed rule change (2002) Patricia Bare-Grounds, USTU Medical Coordinator and USTU Medical Committee Chairperson did not recommend an age to the USTU Board of Directors but provided them research literature that showed athletes are the most vulnerable up to age 10 while other studies cite age 12. It was the pre-adolescent athletes (<12) that were the concern since they are the most vulnerable to head and brain injuries due to their stage of brain and head development. Enclosed you will find Ms. Bare-Grounds' Review of Literature (chapter 2) of her doctoral dissertation on head injuries in the sport of Olympic Taekwondo.

"Who was involved in the decision?"

Ms. Bare-Grounds was contacted by Mr. Jay Warwick (Former Executive Director) and Mr. Dae Sung Lee Dae Sung Lee, (Former Junior Olympic Committee Chairman) to provide data from her research that would show a need for a rule change and that junior safety rules were not working. The USTU Executive Committee and membership had to vote on it in an open forum meeting. Ms. Bare-Grounds was not personally at the meeting although she had taken great amount of criticism for providing what many USTU leaders thought to be unreliable data.

"What data was utilized to make this decision?"

Actual USTU national event injury data and detailed information collected for Ms. Bare-Grounds' dissertation beginning in 2000 was used. Although references to injuries (torn retina, orbital blowout fracture, jaw fractures and dislocations in the 6-9 year olds) were brought forward from events prior to the beginning of her research, injury data was collected from events. (Please note: this data is available in electronic format upon request).

"What is the current process of informing athletes and their parents of the risks of head injury to athletes?"

The process of informing the athletes of the risks involved is stated on the membership application form (please see enclosed form and is also on the USTU web site under membership, (<https://www.ustu.org/commerce/memberapp.shtml>)). In addition, there are safety warnings on the head gear. In order to participate in USTU sanctioned events they must sign the waiver as athletes. If the athlete is a minor the parents also have to sign the waiver form regarding the inherent risks of the sport, as is done for other sports. Any athlete who sustains a head injury, and who has a parent in attendance at the competition, the medical staff will bring the parent into the triage area and cover everything about head injuries, what to watch for, etc. USTU also provides a "take home" sheet to cover anything that might occur after leaving the event that may need further medical attention. Finally, the risks in the sport of taekwondo are visible in any taekwondo practice or match, which involve full contact in this martial art.

"Why does the United States Taekwondo Union not have a program to track injuries to athletes?"

According to Ms. Bare-Grounds she has been told by the past leadership that "it would be a logistical nightmare", although she has proposed several times to accept the "passport system" as is currently used by USA Boxing for head injuries (I personally feel that we could install a similar system for Taekwondo). The USTU has a 30-day-out rule but due to limited number of staff has difficulty in tracking the injuries or enforcing the rule, except where they have recorded injury data from an event within the past 30 days or it is an Olympic Training Center athlete in which great amounts of injury data are recorded. In the case of USA Boxing each athlete has a "passport" that they must have to check in at a competition. It is turned in and not returned until after all fights are completed. If the athlete is knocked-out, sustains a head injury which does not clear or the ringside physician deems it necessary to apply the 30-day-out rule the passport is not returned to the athlete for 30 days, no exceptions, not even if another doctor clears the athlete¹.

¹ USA Boxing has now gone to a 90-day-out rule for some cases, especially those involving repetitive hits in the same day or consecutive events.

Ms. Bare-Grounds in the past had proposed this system to the former president (Sang Chul Lee) of the USTU, the Referee Chairman (Eui Bin Lee) and the former USTU Executive Committee without any success in the development of a passport type system.

The problem is not tracking the injuries at national events (Junior Olympics, US Open, etc.) as the USTU does a good job of that between the data collection and the Olympic Training Center, but this information has never been developed into a common database and in addition no information is received from local, state or regional events. According to Ms. Bare-Grounds, "initially it would be a big undertaking to get all competitive pipeline athletes assigned a passport book and to set up a database, and then to get everyone to report these injuries" but she feels it could be done. There are many head injury tracking databases presently on the market and are available. (Would it be possible to apply for Governmental funding for initiatives such as this?). In the future the USTU is investigating a regionalized events concept which the USTU would operate, thus not having to rely on non paid volunteer staff to report injuries at the regional level which would take the place of the state organization administered tournament and events.

"What preventative measures are being taken to reduce the risk of serious head injury?"

First and foremost all competitors must compete in headgear in USTU sanctioned events. In addition, all competitors must wear chest protectors, shin guards, foot guards (all of which offer padding and protection for the athlete) and mouth pieces. Headgear was mandated after the first reported death in 1984. Presently there are no minimum safety standards for Taekwondo gear (ISO, ASTM, NOCSAE, SNELL, and ANSI). Ms. Bare-Grounds presently sits on a committee with the purpose of setting up minimum safety standards for martial arts equipment. The ASTM sets safety standards for all athletic equipment, but no standards for any martial arts equipment or mats.

It is expected that by June 2004 the first ever standard for martial arts headgear will pass ASTM committee ballot. Then the next issue is to get the USTU, the WTF and other martial arts organizations to enforce the use of equipment which has met the ASTM minimum safety standards. Secondly, upon the adoption of an ASTM standard, during safety inspections prior to a match the gear not only has to have the ASTM seal of approval but the gear itself must not have any damage as prescribed by the standards.

What safety measures are in place at competitions to ensure an adequate response to injuries?"

As part of her job at USTU national events, Ms. Bare-Grounds is in charge of the medical care for USTU national events; however the consistency of medical care does not trickle down to local and state run events because in the past they are independently run by the state organizations. At national events the staff includes at least one ATC (certified athletic trainer) per 2 mats of competition and one additional ATC in triage; one Medical Doctor or Physician's Assistant on the competition floor and one in triage; and one sports medicine certified specialist (which has been Dr. Buddy Ramsey for the past 2 years). We also require that a paramedics unit (not simply an ambulance or EMT unit) be present on site for all sparring events.

This unit is usually acquired by Ms. Bare-Grounds at a reduced rate since they are not the first responders and only handle injuries if called upon by a physician or ATC. The ATC, the paramedics and 2 USTU seasoned medical volunteers on the competition floor remain in radio contact at all times. If security must also be called to allow the paramedics to respond they are also in radio contact with the medical coordinator at all times. We maintain first aid supplies to treat as many injuries on site as is feasibly possible, including suturing. The paramedics unit is kept on hand for the availability of advanced life support, drugs, oxygen, and spine board needs to prepare for transport to a hospital. The paramedics are not the ones who usually transport, except in extreme cases (like 4 transports at one time); they simply provide the second level of care while awaiting transport to a hospital. In most cases athletes with minor injuries are transported by the support staff (coaches, athletes, parents) in a private vehicle to either a walk-in clinic or emergency room of a hospital. Only those cases which require advanced life support or backboard are normally transported by ambulance.

What data are available nationally or internationally to support 14 years as an appropriate age for full contact sparring."

Taekwondo is in line with other high risk contact sports including boxing and football which allow full contact to head and body of adolescent athletes. I wrote the World Taekwondo this past week to see if they have pertinent data regarding full contact sparring at 14 years old. Please refer to Ms. Bare-Grounds dissertation which can provide you with background information. In addition please go to the following web site for more statistical data on sport safety and injury rates.

<http://www.biausa.org/word.files.to.pdf/good.pdfs/2002.Fact.Sheet.sports.and.rec.pdf>

Currently the USTU is incorporating new software (Ring Master) into their national events and trials, which will allow the USTU to ascertain percentages (confirmed points) of contact to different parts of the body by match as well as an entire tournament/event or trials. On April 16-18, 2004, the USTU hosted the Junior World Championship Trials (14 -17 years old) at the US Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, CO. This software from the Junior World Trials yielded the following datum:

Total Matches	Kicks to the Trunk	Kicks to the Head	Percentage
54	432	42	91% Trunk 9% Head

"How do 14-year-olds fare in international competition with regards to injury and competitiveness?"

Below are the 2002 and 2004 Junior World Championship Teams (14 to 17 year old age grouping). Ms. Bare-Grounds has an injury data base which upon request can send it to you electronically.

2003 USA Team Junior World Championship Results

October 1 – 6, 2002

Heraklion, Greece

Results: Women's Team: **1 Silver, 1 Bronze**
 Men's Team: **1 Bronze**

Weight Classification	Women's Team	Men's Team
Fin	Jesika Torres	Christopher Kae (Bronze)
Fly	Aimee Callison	James Howe II
Bantam	Danielle Holmquist	Alexander Soriano
Feather	Natalie Martinez (Bronze)	James Wong
Light	Brittany Nickolyn	Jeffery Jenkins
Welter	Jessica Miron	Anthony Bell
Light Middle	Kimi Williamson	Eric Loker
Middle	La Shondra Rawls	Stephen Lambdin
Light Heavy	Youngshin Chang (Silver)	Brian McEuin
Heavy	Lauren Cahoon	Chance Cole

2004 USA Junior World Championship Team - The USA Junior Team will compete in the Junior World Championships in Suncheon, Korea June 12 – 18, 2004. The 2004 team has been named:

Weight Classification	Women's Team	Men's Team
Fin	Nicole Suter	John Duhart
Fly	Jesika Torres,	Sean Keeton
Bantam	Aimee Callison	Jon Perieda
Feather	Giganni Lopez	James Howe II
Light	Danielle Holmquist	Justin White
Welter	Eleni Koutsilianos	Trevor Neville
Light Middle	Shantara Johnson	Dustin Allen
Middle	Taylor Stone	Jared Wilder
Light Heavy	Brittany Nickolyn	James Moontasri
Heavy	Maia Eubanks	Stephen Lambdin

Names in Bold = 2002 Junior National team members

Please note because we have passed this ruling this will not prevent coaches and schools from permitting it, particularly where some coaches will likely believe that it is necessary to develop internationally competitive athletes.

In the review of research of Ericsson (1995), Bloom (1985), Balyi (2000) and others believe that it takes 10 years to develop expert performance or world class athletes, therefore we as the NGB have a delicate balancing act to insure safety and at the same time to develop internationally capable Olympic athletes. We are cognizant of the potential risks and the implications that a rule can have on our athletes both from a safety standpoint and from a developmental point of view. Safety is and should be paramount to the well being of all athletes. At the same time we as the National Governing Body need to best identify ways to prepare athletes in our pipeline for international success and the rules in that context permit, and reward, head contact. In order for the USTU to be in compliance with the World Taekwondo Federation we must adhere to their competition rules and standards, as the NGB must be a member organization to have athletes compete and at the same time develop into competitive Olympic caliber Taekwondo athletes.

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Should you require and additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Bob Gambardella
Chief Executive Officer/ Secretary General
United States Taekwondo Union

cc: Bill Martin, USOC Acting President
Jim Scherr, USOC Chief of Sport Performance
Steve Locke, Chair, USTU Governance and Management Committee
Jeff Benz, USOC General Counsel
Steve Bull, USOC Director Governmental Affairs
Steve Bull, USOC Director, Government Relations
Steve Roush, Director, USOC Sport Partnerships Division
Kelly Skinner, Director, USOC Sport Partnerships Division