

# DEATH UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT: THE MANUEL VELAZQUEZ COLLECTION, 2011

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# Introduction

Manuel Velazquez, the man who started this collection during the 1940s, was against boxing. Me, I am neither for nor against boxing: Like Zen, it is. On the positive side, boxing is good exercise and it fulfills many youngsters' dreams. The French sociologist Loïc Wacquant has done a good job of explaining the individual boxer's perspective.<sup>1</sup> On the negative side, people get hurt while boxing, and injured people sometimes die.

Between these poles lies the business of boxing. What boxing? Bluntly, it involves selling those youngsters' dreams to gamblers. As casino owner Donald Trump once told journalist Phil Berger, there is "a direct relation between a high roller in the gaming sense and a boxing fan. Boxing, more than any other sport, brings out the highly-competitive person."<sup>2</sup> In other words, during the 1990s, boxing cards brought an extra US \$15 million a week in business into Trump's casinos, and almost US \$2 million a week in profits. It was no different in the past, as in April 1750, William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, reportedly lost £10,000 (which would be like losing a million pounds today) betting on a fight between Jack Broughton and Jack Slack.<sup>3</sup>

I cannot do anything about the business of boxing. On the other hand, perhaps I can do something about honoring those who lost more than dreams and money to boxing. Therefore, I present the Velazquez Collection as a memorial to those who died.

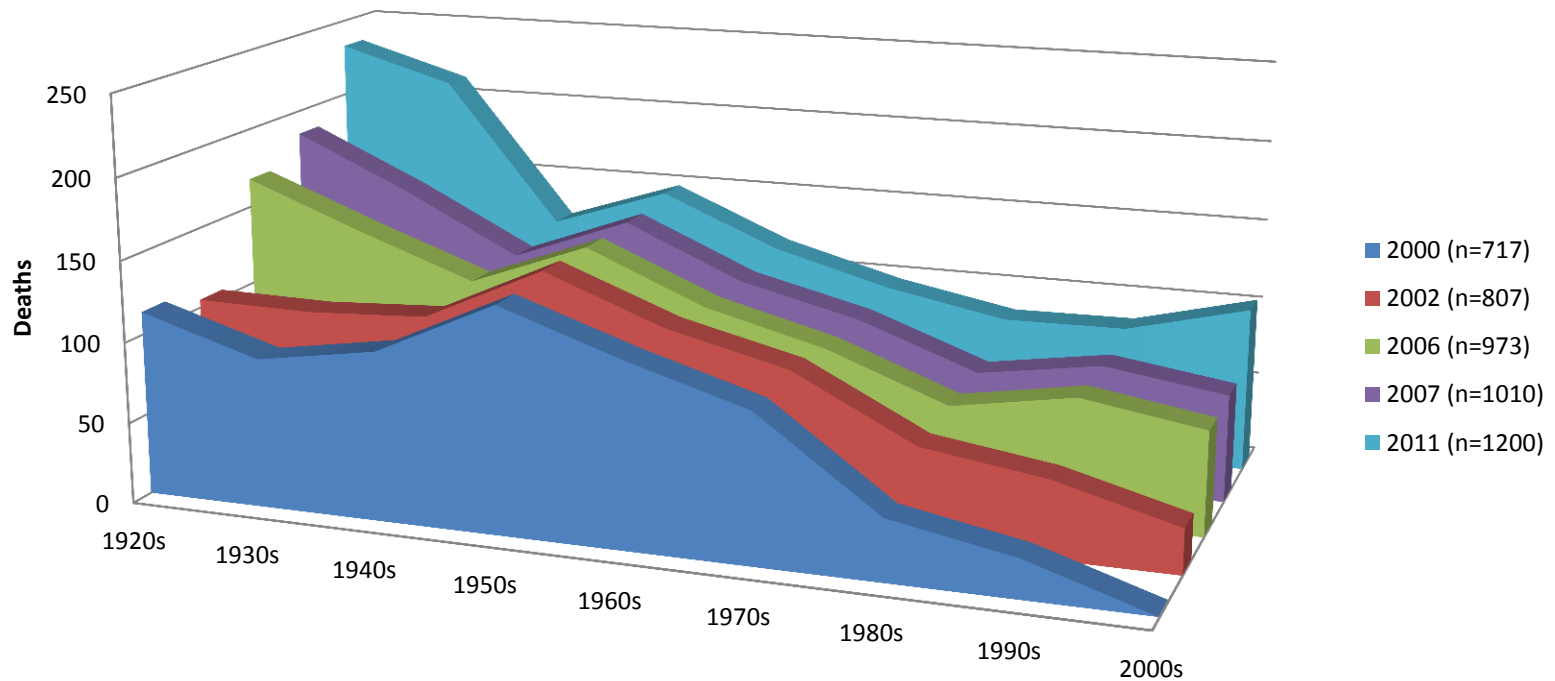
<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Wacquant's 1994 article, "The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Feel about Their Trade," at [http://sociology.berkeley.edu/public\\_sociology/Wacquant.pdf](http://sociology.berkeley.edu/public_sociology/Wacquant.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Phil Berger, 1993. *Punch Lines*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows. The entire section from pages 183-193 is valuable .

<sup>3</sup> Randy Roberts. 1977. "Eighteenth Century Boxing," *Journal of Sport History* 4:3 (Fall), 252.

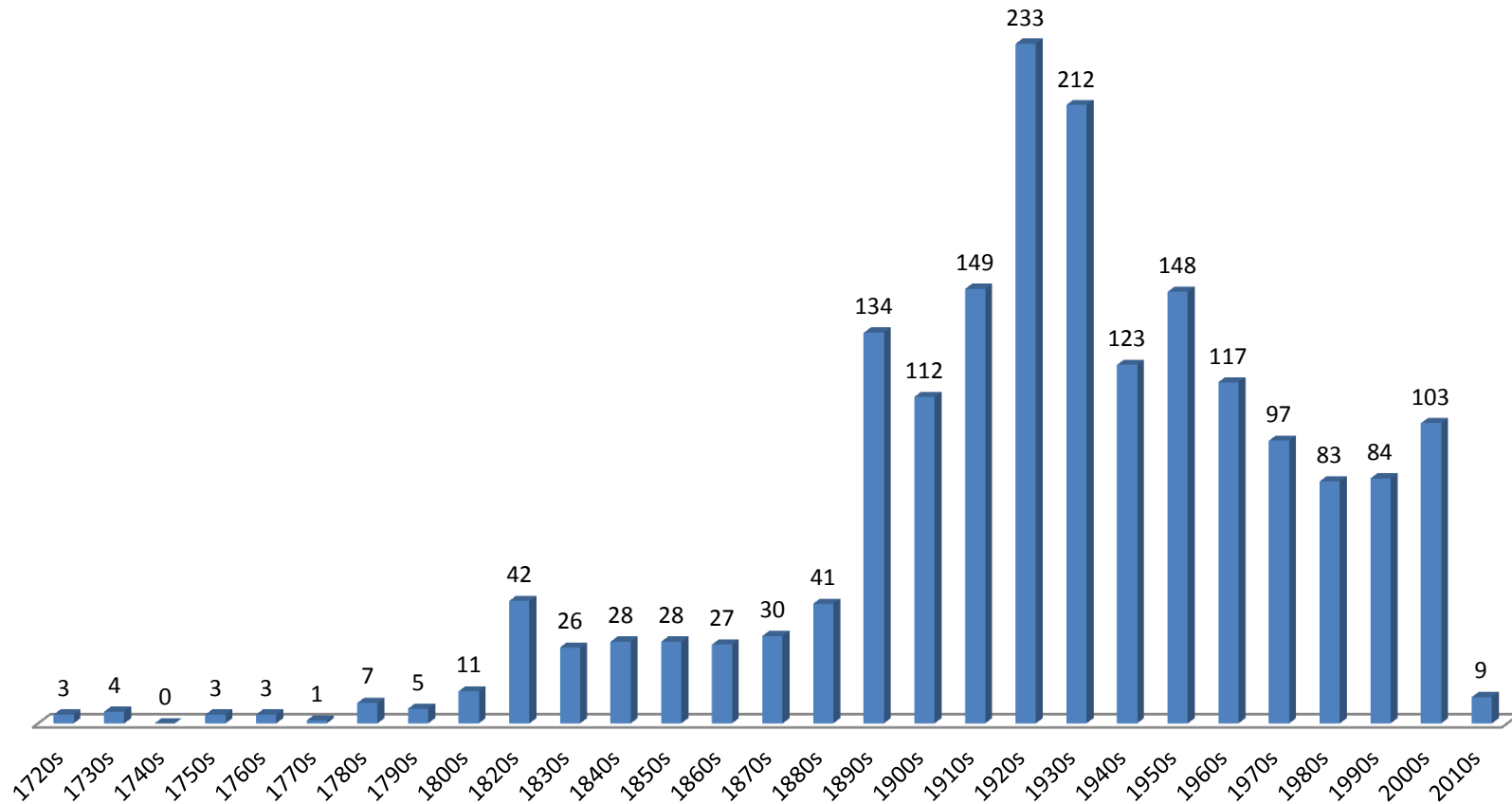
# Table 1: Changes in the collection over time

When the Manuel Velazquez Collection first went online in July 2000, it listed 938 deaths. In November 2007, it documented 1,465 deaths, and in October 2011, it documented 1,865 deaths. Table 1 shows changes in the number of documented deaths over time.



# Table 2: Deaths per decade, 1720-2011

Table 2 shows the number of currently documented deaths per decade.



# Jack Broughton

The 2011 update shows *no* deaths during the 1740s. This is mentioned because the collection previously indicated that the English heavyweight champion Jack Broughton (1704-1789, and reputed author of a set of rules that regulated prizefighting into the 1830s) was involved in a ring fatality in April 1741. The documentation for this event was Paul Whitehead's mock-heroic poem "The Gymnasiad, or boxing-match" (1744). I have not found anything in the newspapers of 1741 to document Stevenson's death, and in *A Treatise upon the Useful Science of Defence* (1747), Captain John Godfrey described Broughton's opponent, George Stevenson, in the present tense. ("The Coachman is a most beautiful Hitter; he put in his Blows faster than BROUGHTON, but then one of the latter's told for three of the former's.") Consequently, the Broughton-Stevenson fight is no longer included on the list. I am indebted to Iain Manson (author of *The Lion and the Eagle*, 2008) for this correction.





# Medical issues

In the past, my analysis concentrated on medical issues. This is no longer necessary. The reason is that medical analysis now appears elsewhere. See L.C. Baird, C.B. Newman, H. Volk, J.R. Svinth, J. Conklin, and M.L. Levy, “Mortality resulting from head injury in professional boxing,” *Neurosurgery* 67(5), November 2010, 1444-1450, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20948404>. The same group is currently working on a comparable analysis of amateur boxing. Therefore, my analysis this time is going to focus on globalization issues.

[Neurosurgery](#). 2010 Nov;67(5):1444-50; discussion 1450.

**Mortality resulting from head injury in professional boxing.**

[Baird LC](#), [Newman CB](#), [Volk H](#), [Svinth JR](#), [Conklin J](#), [Levy ML](#).

**Source**

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**Abstract**

**BACKGROUND:**

The majority of boxing-related fatalities result from traumatic brain injury. Biomechanical forces in boxing result in rotational acceleration with resultant subdural hematoma and diffuse axonal injury.

**OBJECTIVE:**

Given the inherent risk and the ongoing criticism boxing has received, we evaluated mortalities associated with professional boxing.

**METHODS:**

We used the Velazquez Fatality Collection of boxing injuries and supplementary sources to analyze mortality from 1950 to 2007. Variables evaluated included age at time of death, association with knockout or other outcome of match, rounds fought, weight class, location of fight, and location of preterminal event.

**RESULTS:**

There were 339 mortalities between 1950 and 2007 (mean age,  $24 \pm 3.8$  years); 64% were associated with knockout and 15% with technical knockout. A higher percentage occurred in the lower weight classes. The preterminal event occurred in the ring (61%), in the locker room (17%), and outside the arena (22%). We evaluated for significant changes after 1983 when championship bouts were reduced from 15 to 12 rounds.

**CONCLUSION:**

There was a significant decline in mortality after 1983. We found no significant variables to support that this decline is related to a reduction in rounds. Rather, we hypothesize the decline to be the result of a reduction in exposure to repetitive head trauma (shorter careers and fewer fights), along with increased medical oversight and stricter safety regulations. Increased efforts should be made to improve medical supervisions of boxers. Mandatory central nervous system imaging after a knockout could lead to a significant reduction in associated mortality.

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**Publication Types**

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# The globalization of boxing

Death data suggest that boxing started in England rather than Britain, and that it spread into Wales, the United States, and Australia before it spread into Scotland or Continental Europe. The data go on to suggest that boxing's spread into non-Anglophonic countries was quite slow. Indeed, to judge by death data, its spread outside Anglophonic countries (and to a much lesser extent, France and colonial Algeria) is essentially a post-World War II phenomenon.

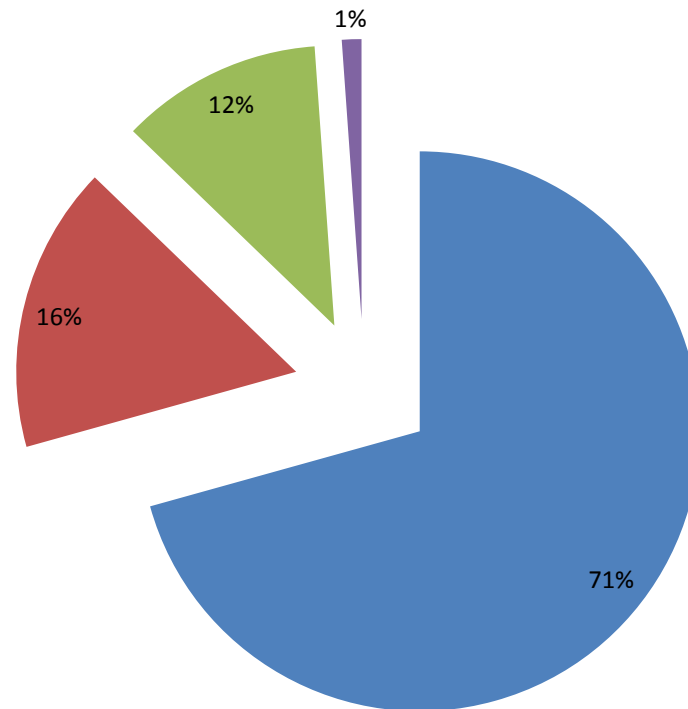
Table 4 shows where boxers died during the bare-knuckle era, which lasted from the 1720s until the 1880s. Deaths during the bare-knuckle era were concentrated in England, Australia, and the United States.

Tables 5 and 6 show where boxing deaths occurred during the era of glove fighting, which is roughly 1880 to present. From 1880 to 1945, deaths remained concentrated in English-speaking countries. However, after World War II, decolonization, television, and the International Olympics spread boxing around the world. This resulted in different patterns than before the war, and these different patterns are shown in Table 6.



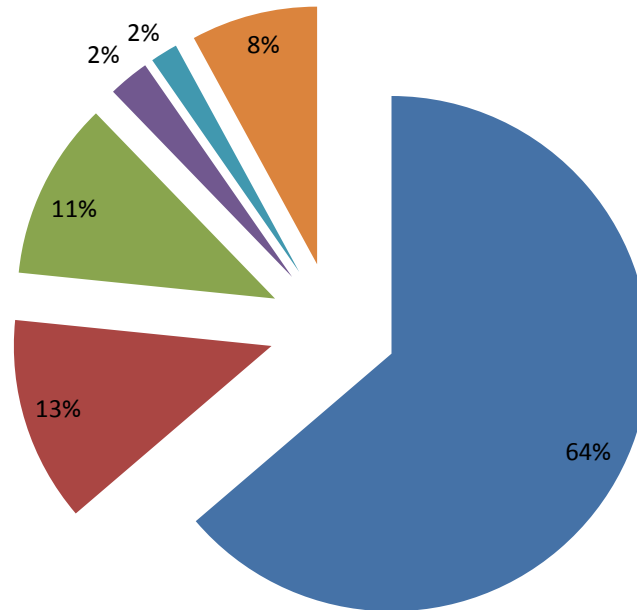
# Table 4: Boxing deaths, world, 1725-1889 (n=266)

■ UK (n=188)   ■ USA (n=44)   ■ Australia (n=31)   ■ Other (n=3)

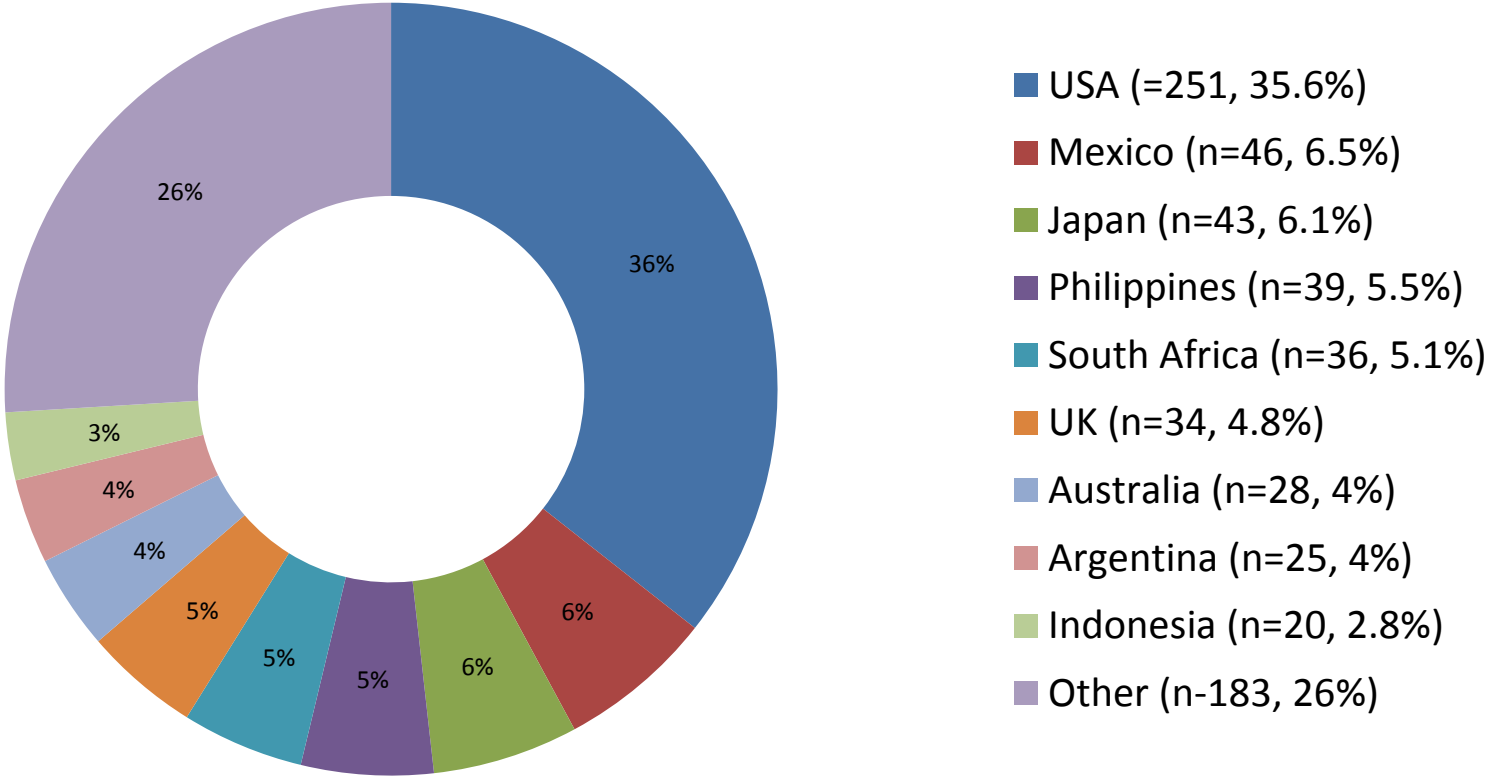


# Table 5: Boxing deaths, world, 1880-1945 (n=932)

■ USA (n=594, 64%)      ■ UK (n=120, 13%)      ■ Australia (n=104, 11%)  
■ New Zealand (n=24, 2.6%)      ■ Canada (n=16, 1.3%)      ■ Other (n=74, 8%)



# Table 6: Boxing deaths, world, 1946-2010 (n=705)



# Boxing as an urban, industrial activity

Boxing deaths are overwhelmingly associated with industrial cities. For example, just six English cities account for over half of Britain's boxing fatalities. Similarly, in Wales, deaths cluster around the coal-mining towns of the Rhondda Valley, and in Scotland, they cluster in Glasgow. This pattern appears to be reasonably universal, as internationally, just nine cities account for 20 percent of all known boxing deaths. However, the individual city that has the most deaths changes over time. Until the late nineteenth century, the city was London. During the first half of the twentieth century, the city was New York. During the last half of the twentieth century, the city was Tokyo.

My guess is that boxing's association with industrial cities has much to do with urban working-class bachelor subculture. After work, unmarried working men gather to smoke, drink, gamble, and tell lies in clubs and bars. Eventually, someone asks: "Who is the toughest among us? Want to bet on it?" And even when the men in the bar content themselves by watching men fight on stage or on television, the question remains: "Who is the toughest of these two guys? Want to bet on it?"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For further reading on the topic of boxing's role in the masculine subculture of US cities, see Jeffrey T. Sammons. 1988. *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society*. Urbana: University of Illinois; Loïc J.D. Wacquant. 1995. "The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Think and Feel about Their Trade," *Theory and Society* 24:4 (August), 489-535; and S. Kirson Weinberg and Henry Arond. 1952. "The Occupational Culture of the Boxer," *American Journal of Sociology* 57:5 (March), 460-469.

# Table 7: English boxing deaths, 1725-2011 (n=292)

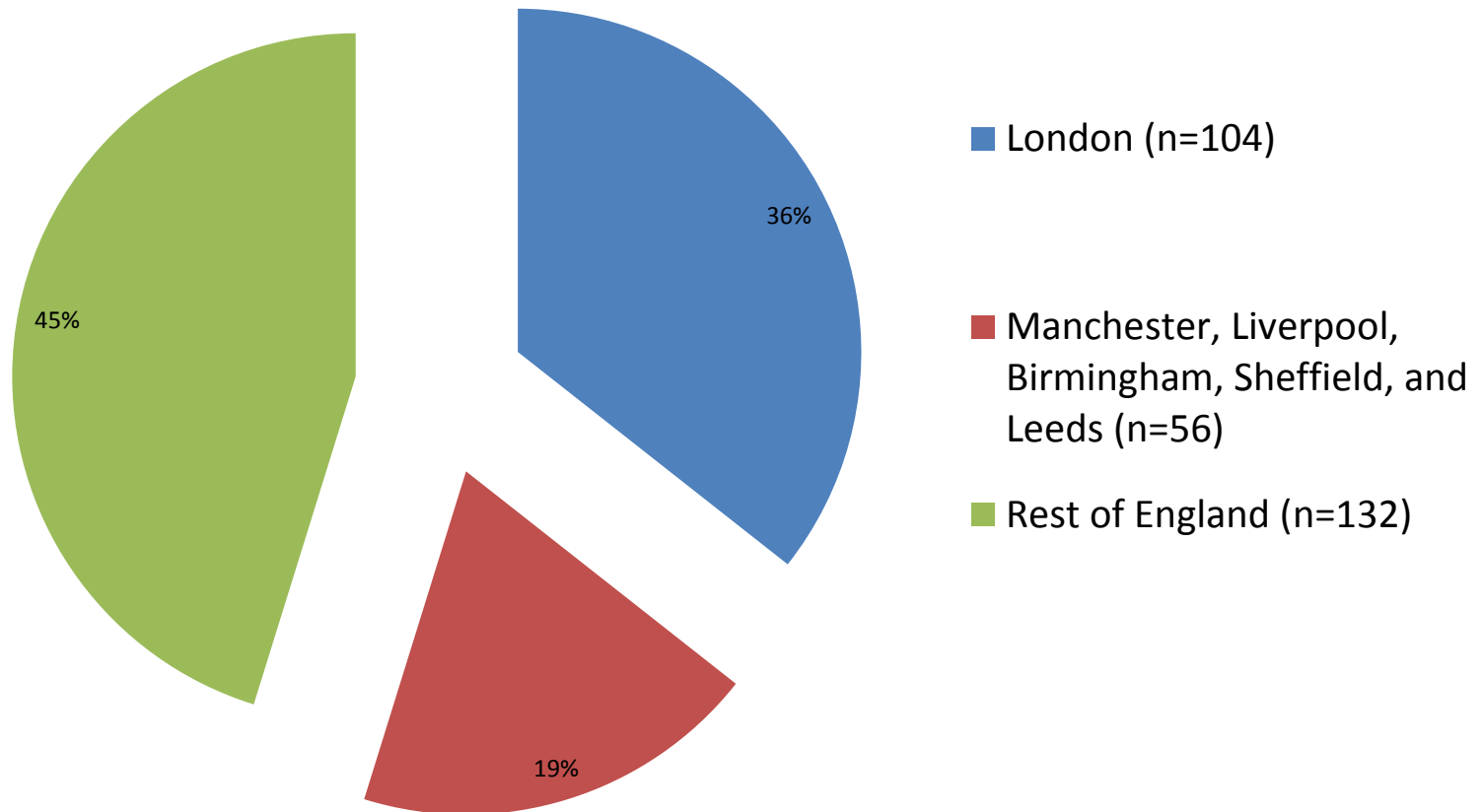


Table 8: Nine cities account for one-fifth of all boxing deaths, 1725-2011 (n=375/1865, 20%)

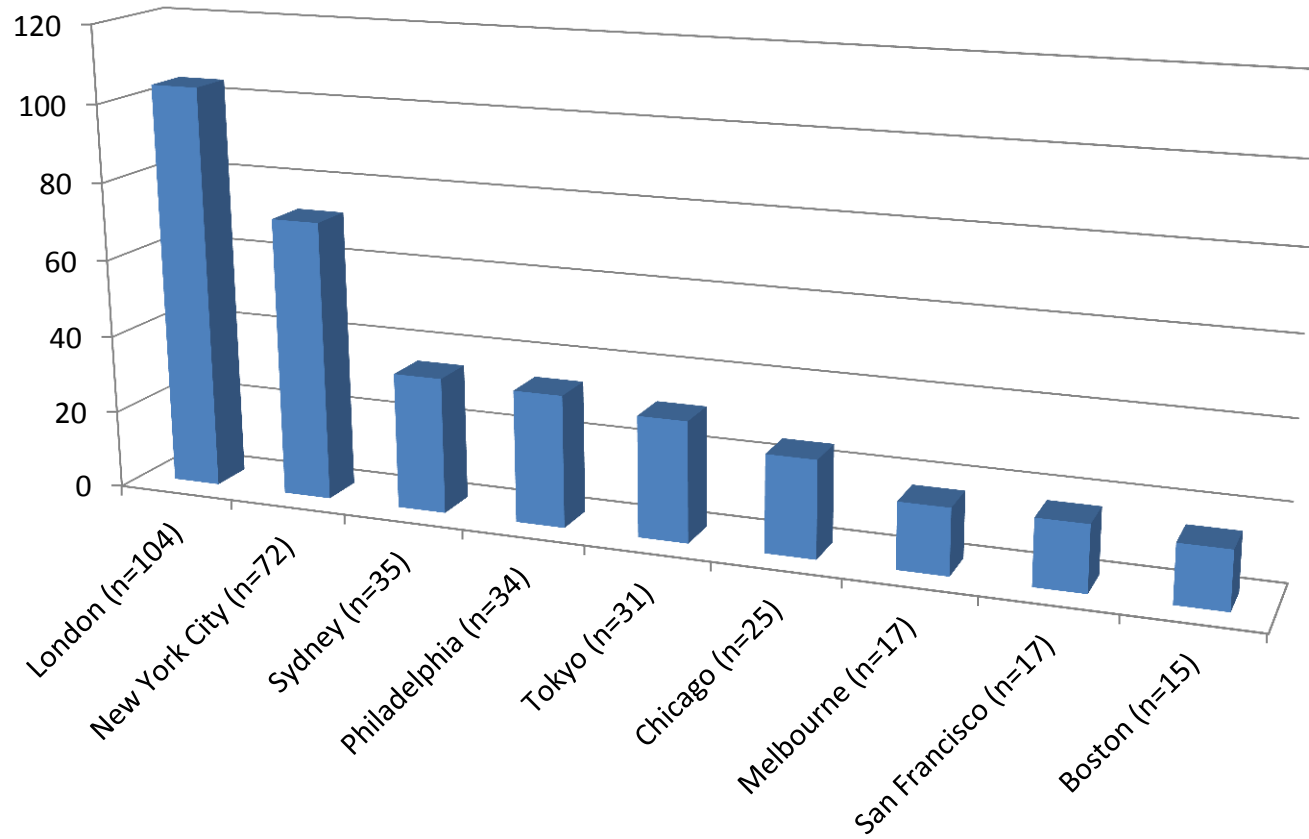
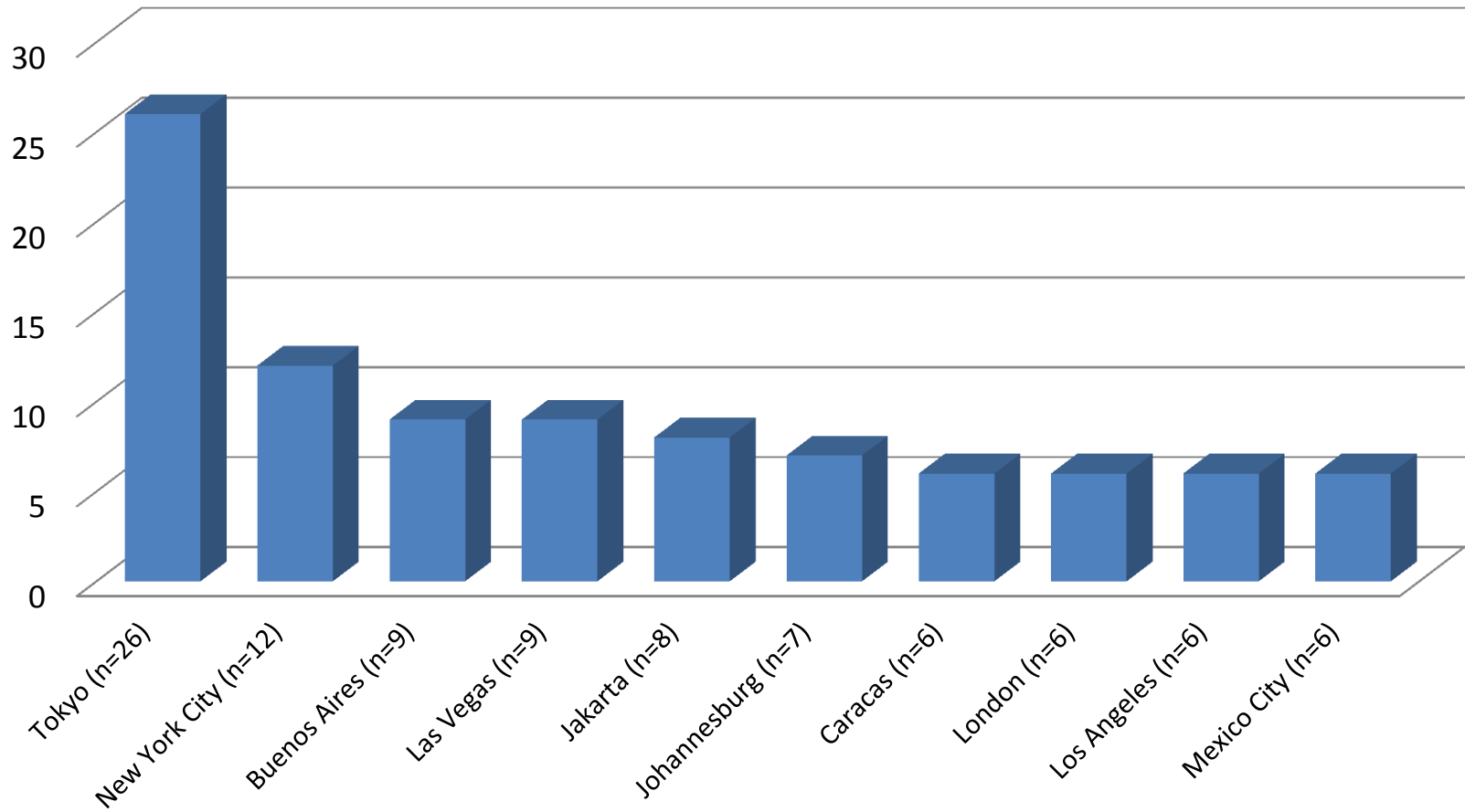


Table 9: Cities reporting six or more boxing deaths, 1950-2011 (n= 95/557, 17.1%)



# Table 10: The USA

The United States currently accounts for just under half of all known boxing fatalities (871/1865, 47%). Just two of the fifty US states currently have no documented boxing deaths.

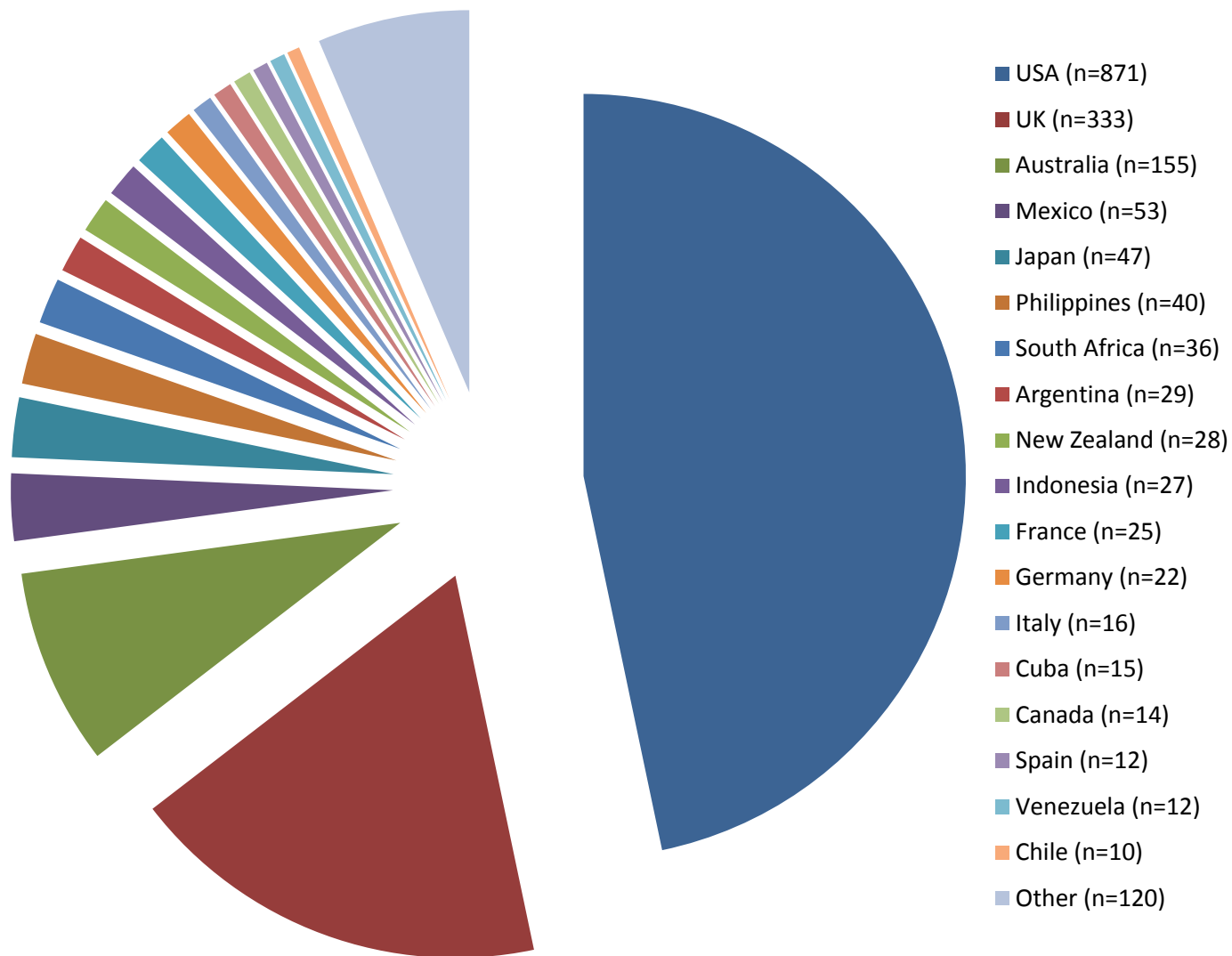
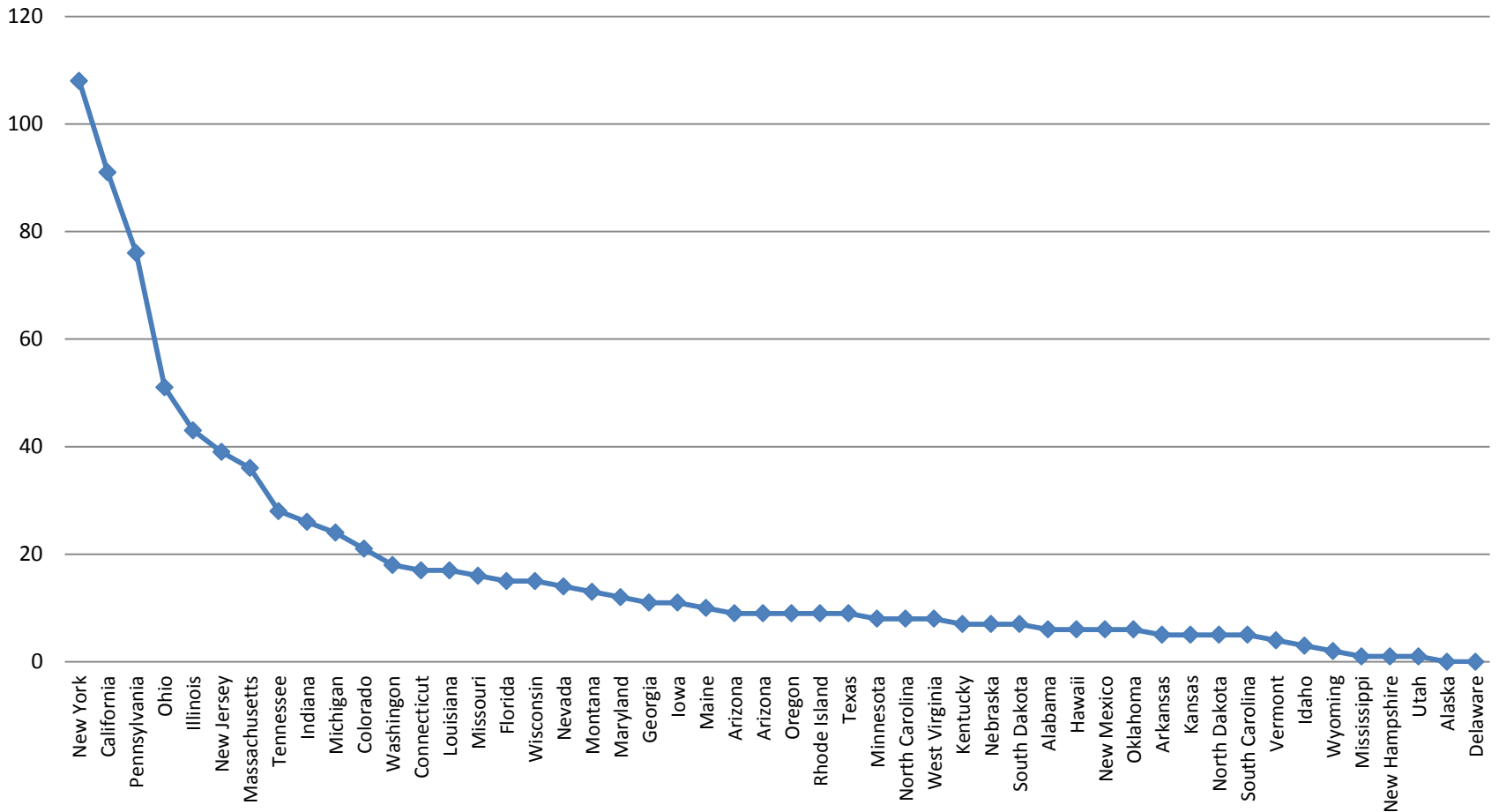




Table 11: US boxing fatalities (871/1865, 47%;  
858 in states, 13 in territories or overseas bases)



## Table 12: Urban sprawl

California has more boxing deaths (91) than any US state except New York (108). However, with the exception of San Francisco, no individual California city has an unusually high number of deaths. This would seem to disprove my theory that boxing is associated with working-class males living in an urbanized bachelor subculture. But what needs to be remembered is that boxing developed in California concurrently with an automobile culture. Thus, while the City of Los Angeles has just 8 deaths, Los Angeles County has 22. In other words, in California, boxing deaths follow the agglomeration of Greater Los Angeles.

City	No	County
San Francisco	17	San Francisco
Los Angeles	8	Los Angeles
Fresno	5	Fresno
San Jose	4	Santa Clara
San Diego	4	San Diego
Stockton	3	San Joaquin
Oakland	3	Alameda
Sacramento	3	Sacramento
Hollywood	3	Los Angeles
Bakersfield	2	Kern
San Bernardino	2	San Bernardino
Long Beach	2	Los Angeles
Vernon	2	Los Angeles
Coalinga	1	Fresno
Hollister	1	San Benito
Lodi	1	San Joaquin
Santa Cruz	1	Santa Cruz
Parks AFB	1	Alameda
Chico	1	Butte
Fort Baker	1	Marin
Sausalito	1	Marin
Covelo	1	Mendocino
Merced	1	Merced
Salinas	1	Monterey
Napa	1	Napa
Grass Valley	1	Nevada
Folsom Prison	1	Sacramento
Colma	1	San Mateo
Santa Rosa	1	Sonoma
Marysville	1	Yuba
El Centro	1	Imperial
Bell	1	Los Angeles
Calabasas	1	Los Angeles
El Monte	1	Los Angeles
La Verne	1	Los Angeles
Pasadena	1	Los Angeles
Sub Base San Pedro	1	Los Angeles
Whittier	1	Los Angeles
El Toro	1	Orange
Santa Ana	1	Orange
Palm Desert	1	Riverside
Chino	1	San Bernardino
MCRD San Diego	1	San Diego
Ocean Park	1	Santa Monica
Yreka	1	Siskiyou
Ventura	1	Ventura

# Table 13: Death rates in US military boxing

Since 1905, there have been at least 41 boxing deaths involving US military personnel. This represents about 15 percent (41/273) of the known amateur boxing deaths in the United States and its territories. Further research is likely to show similar patterns in Britain and Australia. Once again, note the bachelor subculture.

Year	Base	Location
1905	Naval Academy Annapolis	Maryland
1905	USS Yankee	Off Dominican Republic
1908	Naval Station Newport	Rhode Island
1909	Boise Barracks	Idaho
1910	National Guard armory	Chillicothe, Ohio
1910	Fort Baker	California
1910	Bluefields	Nicaragua
1911	USS New Hampshire	Off Guantanamo, Cuba
1912	Great Lakes Naval Training Station	Illinois
1915	Brooklyn Navy Yard	New York
1915	Navy Yard Puget Sound, Bremerton	Washington
1916	State Military Reservation	Concord, New Hampshire
1917	Submarine Base San Pedro	California
1918	Camp Taylor	Kentucky
1918	Camp Meade	Maryland
1919	Military carnival, LeMans	France
1921	Naval Academy Annapolis	Maryland
1921	Naval Academy Annapolis	Maryland
1927	Coast Guard Academy New London	Connecticut
1927	Mt. Gretna Military Encampment	Pennsylvania
1933	Canal Zone	Panama
1938	Fort Francis E. Warren	Wyoming
1941	Camp Grant	Illinois
1942	Fort Sill	Oklahoma
1944	Great Lakes Naval Training Station	Illinois
1949	Memphis Naval Air Station	Tennessee
1953	Brooks Air Force Base	Texas
1954	Parks Air Force Base	California
1954	Naval Auxiliary Air Station Saufley Field	Florida
1954	Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island	South Carolina
1963	Camp Sukiran	Okinawa
1965	Da Nang	Vietnam
1977	US Military Academy West Point	New York
1987	Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego	California
1990	Fort Carson	Colorado
1991	Fort Huachuca	Arizona
1993	Kelly Air Force Base	Texas
1997	Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island	South Carolina
2006	Fort Benning	Georgia
2008	Camp Casey	Republic of Korea
2010	Camp Lejeune	North Carolina

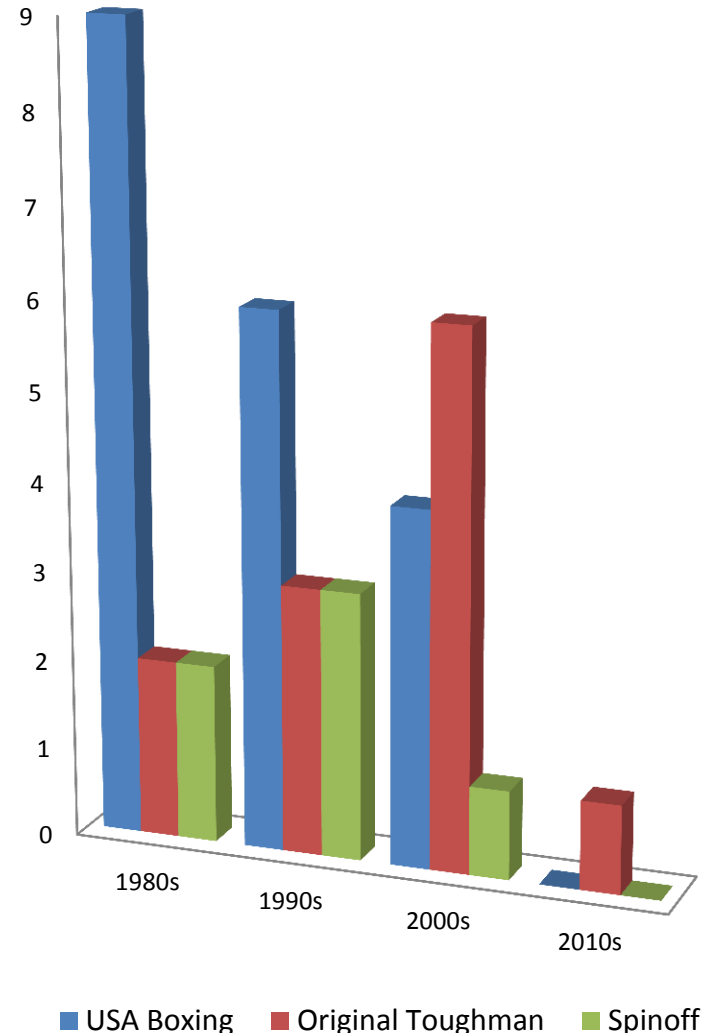
# Table 14: Toughman

Toughman is a system of semi-professional boxing unique to the United States that dates to 1979. On this chart, “Original Toughman” refers to the Original Toughman organization, while “spinoff” refers to all other organizations.

Based on raw numbers, one could claim that Toughman-style boxing is no more dangerous than amateur boxing. However, that would be to misrepresent the data. The reason is that USA Boxing sanctions about 24,000 bouts per year whereas the Original Toughman organization sanctions about 3,000 bouts per year. In other words, amateur boxing is about eight times safer.

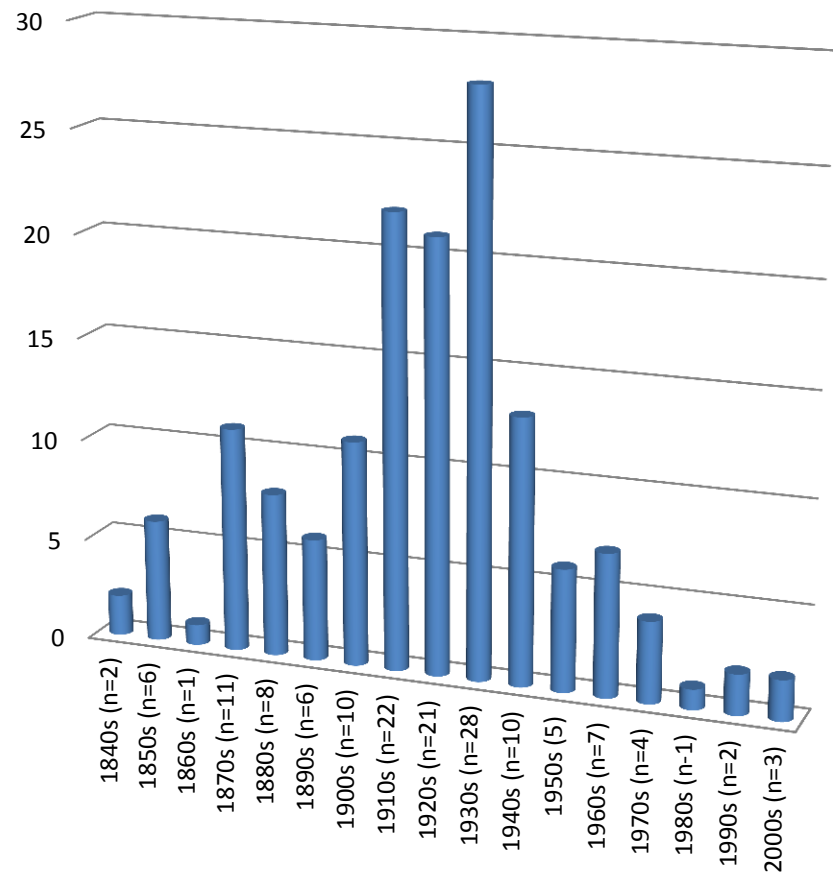
How much safer is this in real terms? Well, if we were talking about motor vehicle crashes instead of boxing, USA Boxing would be a minivan, while Toughman would be a subcompact.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Tom Wenzel and Marc Ross, “Are SUVs Safer than Cars? An Analysis by Vehicle Type and Model,” Transportation Research Board 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting, Washington DC, January 15, 2003, [http://eetd.lbl.gov/ea/teepa/pdf/TRB\\_Safety\\_1-03.pdf](http://eetd.lbl.gov/ea/teepa/pdf/TRB_Safety_1-03.pdf).



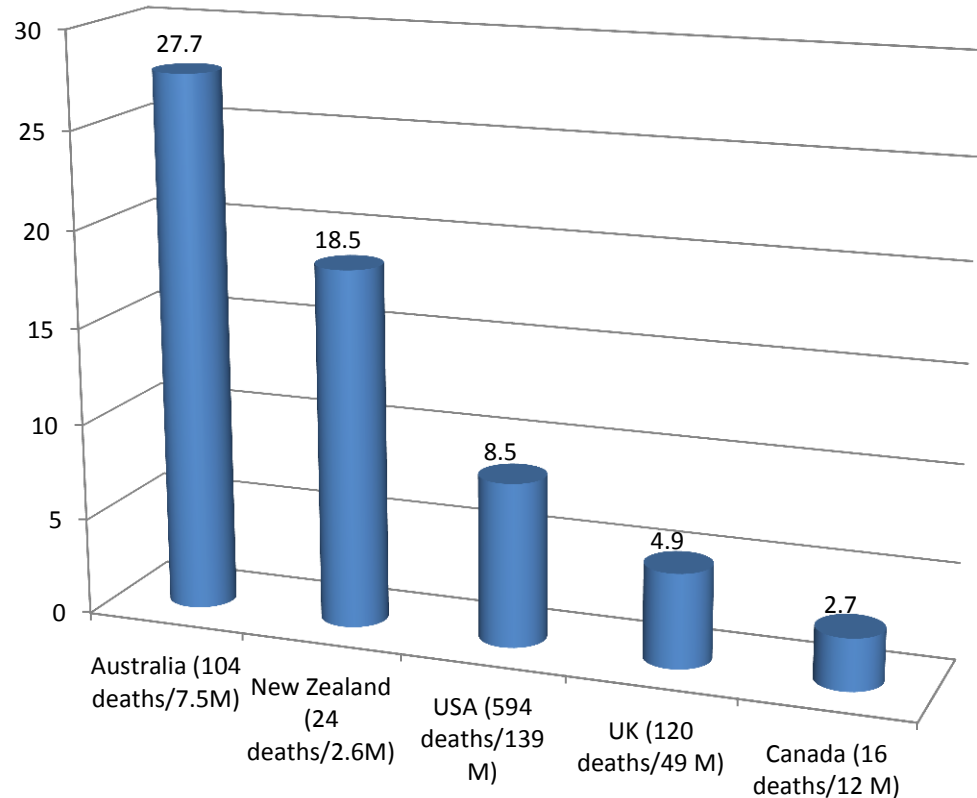
# Table 15: Australian boxing deaths by decade, 1830-2009

Only the United States (n=871) and the United Kingdom (n=333) have had more boxing fatalities than Australia (n=155).



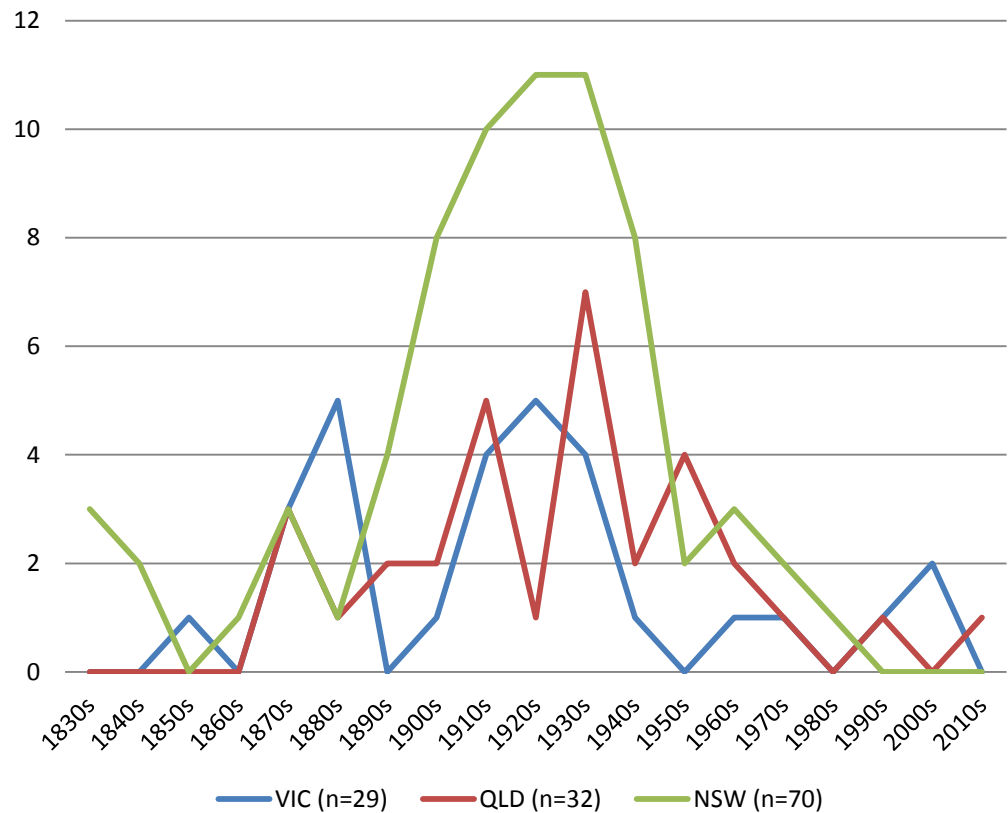
# Table 16: Death rate, 1880-1945, per million people (1945 population)

During the first half of the twentieth century, Australia had the world's highest per capita rate of boxing fatality. Because there were no female deaths during this period, the rate per million males is actually twice this high.



# Table 17: Boxing deaths in the Australian states of New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria, 1830-2011 (n=131)

Australian ring fatalities soared during the period 1915-1940. Most of these deaths were associated with the Stadiums Limited rings in Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney. Stadiums Limited was owned by Melbourne gambling boss John Wren (1871-1953), and the rule in his stadiums was "Box on."



# Table 18: Some significant court decisions involving boxing fatalities (1 of 4)

- **1866.** *R. v. YOUNG*, (1866) 10 Cox 371. This British case established the precedent that death “caused by an injury received in a friendly sparring match, which is not a thing likely to cause death... is not manslaughter, unless the parties fight on until the sport becomes dangerous.” (Henry Roscoe, *Roscoe’s Digest of the Law of Evidence in Criminal Cases*, Eighth American Edition, volume II, Philadelphia, 1888, p. 912.)
- **1894.** *STATE v. OLYMPIC CLUB*, 24 L.R.A. 452, 15 So 190 (April 1894). The Louisiana court ruled that state laws prohibiting bare-knuckled prizefighting did not apply to gloved contests sponsored by regularly chartered athletic clubs.
- **1914.** *PARMENTIER v. MCGINNIE, et al.*, 157 Wis. 596, 147 N.W. 1007 (1914). The Wisconsin court ruled that the boxing match was not the proximate cause of a boxer’s death, so the estate was not entitled to recover damages from the promoters
- **1922.** *MCADAMS v. WINDHAM*, 208 Ala. 492, 94 So. 742, 30 A.L.R. 194, Nov. 30, 1922. The Alabama court ruled that “a blow thus inflicted in a friendly, mutual combat -- a mere sporting contest -- is not unlawfully inflicted.” Instead, as long as no one was guilty of reckless or negligent conduct, “participants in a violent game have assumed the risk ordinarily incident to their sport.”



# Some significant court decisions (2 of 4)

- **1930.** *HART v. GEYSEL*, 159 Wash. 632, 294 P. 570, 1930. Can suit for wrongful death be brought when both parties had consented to an unlawful fight? The answer in this Washington State case was no. The promoters were also charged in a separate case, and waiting for the outcome of the trial led to a delay in the legalization of professional boxing in Washington State. Compare, however, to:
- **1930.** *TEETERS v. FROST et. ux.*, 1930 OK 467, 145 Okla. 273, 292 P. 356, in which the Oklahoma court ruled for the parents of the deceased and against the promoter (Teeters), saying that a boxing contest for money was a prizefight, no matter what euphemism you used to describe it, and adding that describing a prizefight as a “friendly sparring match” was akin to “describing a wild poker game and then terming it Sunday School.” Thus, in Oklahoma, “each person injured in mutual combat may recover from other all damages caused by injuries, assumption of risk rule not applying.”
- **1931.** *GUSTAFSON v. NEW YORK LIFE INS. CO.*, 55 F.2d 235 (February 19, 1931). The US Court of Appeals ruled that if the death of a boxer was found to be accidental, then the boxer’s beneficiaries were entitled to double indemnity for his accidental death, exactly as stated in the policy. See also Philippine Jurisprudence, G.R. No. L-21574, June 30, 1966, *SIMON DE LA CRUZ vs. CAPITAL INSURANCE AND SURETY CO., INC.*: “Death or disablement resulting from engagement in boxing contests was not declared outside of the protection of the insurance contract. Failure of the defendant insurance company to include death resulting from a boxing match or other sports among the prohibitive risks leads inevitably to the conclusion that it did not intend to limit or exempt itself from liability for such death.”

# Some significant court decisions (3 of 4)

- **1959.** *ROSENSWEIG v. STATE*, 5 N.Y.2d 404, 158 N.E.2d 229, 185 N.Y.S.2d 521 (N.Y. Apr 09, 1959) (NO. 31049). The New York court ruled that the New York State Athletic Commission was not responsible for the medical decisions of ringside physicians. Nonetheless, this case directly contributed to New York State Athletic Commission introducing a mandatory thirty-day break between knockouts. A tie-in civil case settled out of court in 1957 contributed to the demise of the International Boxing Corporation.
- **1985.** *CLASSEN v. STATE OF NEW YORK*, 131 Misc. 2d 346 (1985)/500 N.Y.S. 2d 460 (Ct. Cl. 1985) and *CLASSEN v. IZQUIERDO*, 137 Misc. 2d 489 (1987)/ 520 N.Y.S. 2d 999 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 1987). In the first case, the New York court ruled that there was no malpractice liability for the doctor who cleared the boxer to fight because the doctor had followed accepted procedures. As for the referees, they were not state employees, so the Athletic Commission was not liable for their decisions. In the second case, the court ruled that the ringside physician's duty to the athlete was the same inside the ring as it was inside a hospital or clinic. That is, he needed to follow accepted medical practice. The courts' emphasis on accepted procedures and standards led to the New York State Athletic Commission requiring promoters to have ambulances on site during boxing matches.
- **1986.** *MARTINEZ v. U.S. OLYMPIC COMMITTEE*, C.A. 10 (N.M.), 1986, 802 F. 2d 1275, 55 USLW 2216, 5 Fed. R. Serv. 3d 1253. The Federal court ruled that the estate of an amateur boxer who died from injuries received in a tournament had no claim against the US Olympic Committee.

# Some significant court decisions (4 of 4)

- **1997.** *ESTATE OF GROSS v. THREE RIVERS INN INC.*, 238 A.D. 2d 12, 667 N.Y.S. 2d 71, 1997 N.Y. Slip Op. 11247. The New York court ruled that the survivors of a boxer who died of injuries received during a professional boxing match were not entitled to workers' compensation benefits.
- **1998.** *COSCINO v. LA. STATE BOXING*, 97-2733 (La.App. 4 Cir. 9/9/98). The Louisiana court ruled that the survivors of a boxing official who died from a heart attack suffered while working a seven-bout fight card were entitled to workers' compensation benefits.
- **2001.** *FORONDA v. HAWAII INTERNATIONAL BOXING CLUB*, Civil No. 96 Hawai'i, 25 P.3d 826. The Hawaiian court ruled that a boxer's death from injuries received from a fall was an inherent risk of the sport.
- **2004.** *STACY YOUNG ACT of 2004* (Section 548.008, Florida Statutes). Following the death of a female Toughman fighter, the Florida legislature enacted a law stating that no amateur boxing or kickboxing match could be held in the State of Florida without approval from a state-sanctioned organization.
- **2005.** *SCOTTLAND v. DUVA BOXING LLC*, 109169/04. The boxer's widow filed suit against the ringside physicians, alleging that the doctors failed their duty to exercise reasonable care by stopping the fight. The New York court ruled that the case was grounded in medical malpractice rather than negligence, and then dismissed the case because it was filed after New York's thirty-month statute of limitations on medical malpractice had expired.

# Individual stories

Of course, at the end of the day, the collection is not about statistics or court cases. It is about people.



Ollie Ben Cooper, in dark shirt, back row, center, circa 1918-1919, His brother Lee is standing immediately to Ollie's left, with his right arm on Ollie's left shoulder. Courtesy Ali Cooper

## OLLIE BEN COOPER, AMATEUR BOXER

FATAL BOUT: DECEMBER 2, 1919

DATE OF DEATH: DECEMBER 2, 1919

OPPONENT: STEVEN STITZEL

CAUSE OF DEATH: NOT KNOWN

The bout took place in Cincinnati, Ohio, at the Cincinnati Gymnasium and Athletic Club, located at 111 Shillito Place.

Cooper, aged 18 years, was fighting at middleweight. During the fourth round, Stitzel knocked Cooper down. Cooper stood up, staggered to his corner, and collapsed. He died the same night.

According to Cooper's grand-niece Ali, "My grandpa Lee was there the night Ollie Ben died. The story that my grandpa told was that he had gone to the fight to see his brother fight. He had to go home alone and tell his parents that Ollie Ben had died. He never got over it. They were as close as two brothers could be. Ollie Ben was a very popular kid in Dayton, and grandpa said that over 3,000 people came by the house to see Ollie Ben before they buried him."

**Sources:** Lima (Ohio) *Times-Times Democrat*, December 2, 1919; Fort Wayne (Indiana) *News and Sentinel*, December 2, 1919; *New York Times*, December 3, 1919; emails from Ali Cooper, December 7, 2008 through December 11, 2008