The tragic death of Scottish professional boxer Mike Towell has prompted calls for the sport to be banned. In the Herald on 2\textsuperscript{nd} October 2016, we read:

‘Despite claims from leading industry figures that boxing is safer than ever before, head injury charity Headway said that lessons had not been learned from previous incidents and called for the sport to be outlawed to save young lives.....Dr Otmar Kloiber, the secretary general of the World Medical Association, says there is now a growing understanding of the damage boxing causes to the brain.’

Politicians expressed sadness and sympathy for the relatives but did not join the calls for the sport to be banned. Should they have?

I’m unsure on this one. I have no doubts about so-called sports involving cruelty to animals. These unequal contests are, to my mind, wrong. Boxing though seems to have a kind of dignity about it, with two humans of fairly equal ability, size and weight, competing consensually, within quite strict rules of fair play. I’m not saying it’s a good thing but it’s a
far better thing than much human activity which we do allow. Most of all, it’s not an especially dangerous sport by comparison with many others.

Back in 2009, Government Chief Drugs Advisor, Professor David Nutt, drew our attention the dangers in horse-riding in comparison with the hobby of taking MDMA (Ecstasy) pills. He noted that 1 in 350 horse-riding episodes result in harm while only 1 in 10 000 episodes of ecstasy use do.

Horse-riding, however, does not even make the top five most dangerous sports. *Injurylawyers4U*, who should know about this, surprised me a little by listing these:

1. **Cheerleading**: Figures released by the Department of Education in 2010 showed that 37% of British schools now offer Cheerleading as part of their physical education curriculum. Although some may perceive this sport as fluffy, competitive cheerleading is one of the fastest growing sports in the world. It is also highly skilled and very dangerous. According to research from the United States, 66% of catastrophic sporting injuries (meaning injuries resulting in permanent disabilities or medical issues) amongst females are caused by cheerleading, making it by far the most dangerous sport for women.

2. **Rugby**: In 2010 the Edinburgh University’s Centre for International Public Health Policy, released findings of a study concerning 193 rugby matches at five schools between January and April 2009. The matches resulted in 37 injuries, of which 20 were seen at A&E and one resulted in an overnight stay in hospital for a spinal injury. One of the study’s authors, Professor Allyson Pollock, called for the banning of high tackles and scrums in rugby played at junior level because of the high risk of injury. At premiership level, in the 2008/09 season, 769 match injuries were reported, which is an average of two injuries per club per match.

3. **Motorbike Racing**: The Isle of Man TT race has claimed 240 lives in its 106 year history. It is without a doubt the most dangerous race on the planet. Motorbike racing is a very injury prone sport, because let’s face it, if you hit the ground at 200mph the chances of you receiving a serious injury is very high and there is very little you can do to prevent it.
4. **Cycling:** This may surprise you but cycling is one the most dangerous sports you can participate in. Each year thousands of cyclists are injured on British roads and in 2012 over one hundred cyclists lost their lives.*

5. **Cave Diving:** Officially the most dangerous sport in the world cave diving is considered so risky that many articles have been written examining the psychological effects of this incredibly dangerous activity. One of the reasons this sport is so perilous is that even years of experience can count for nothing if you find yourself in difficulties. In dark, enclosed spaces a person’s vulnerability to panic, anxiety and disorientation is amplified to an extreme degree and it becomes very easy to make disastrous mistakes. There is no light, limited oxygen and your exit route can be cut off in an instant.

We haven’t even considered mountaineering, squash, rally car driving and other martial arts. I don’t know where professional boxing stands in a full list of dangerous sports but it looks as if it would be well down that list. Mind you, a short period of amateur boxing as an adolescent may have caused me to develop the thick neck I have. This is perhaps due to the regular dodging of blows (I had no real punch). I now have sleep apnoea which correlates with neck thickness. I don’t recall any protective gear for the head then (c1960) so that might also explain a few other things.

*Readers with an interest in cycling and road safety might like: ‘SNP Cyclepath Strategy under attack from councillors but latter fail to mount credible alternative’ at:


**Sources:**


http://www.injurylawyers4u.co.uk/2014/news/ucks-most-dangerous-sporting-activities/