

First GloveGate, Now BraceGate: Sergio Knee Braces A No Go in NYC

Written by Michael Woods
Monday, 02 June 2014 15:30



TUESDAY AFTERNOON UPDATE: BraceGate is a done deal, friends. The New York State Athletic Commission informed Team Martinez that the sleeves he wants to wear, to offer a bit of extra support to his knees, are A-OK with them. Thus, Sergio can have that peace of mind heading into his Saturday cclash against Miguel Cotto at Madison Square Garden.

Here is the release put out by NYSAC, speaking to their stance on sleeves and braces.

Executive Director Memo: 2014-6

June 2, 2014

Use of Knee Braces and Sleeves

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Boxers will not be permitted to wear a knee brace during a bout. Boxers will be permitted to wear a knee sleeve during a bout under the following conditions: (1) the boxer will receive no competitive advantage from wearing the sleeve; (2) the knee sleeve will not pose any danger to the boxer's opponent; and (3) the boxer—without the knee sleeve—is found medically fit to compete by the physician appointed by the Commission to examine the boxer prior to the scheduled bout.

In order for the Commission to properly evaluate a knee sleeve that a boxer wishes to wear during a bout, the boxer or boxer's representative must present such knee sleeve to the Commission in a timely manner.

Promoter Lou DiBella told TSS he gives the commission, and new executive director David Berlin, high marks for their timely and pragmatic response to the issue, which popped up late Monday morning, after Team Cotto noticed Sergio's knee brace/sleeve in footage seen on HBO's 24/7 program. "I have to thank the commission for the ruling and prompt attention to the situation," DiBella said.

GloveGate goofed up the May 3 Floyd Mayweather-Marcos Maidana fight lead-in, and it looks like a similar sort of beef is exploding into a thing as we count down to the June 7 clash between middleweight titlist **Sergio Martinez** and **Miguel Cotto** in the Madison Square Garden Big Room.

During a Martinez meet 'n' greet at the Times Square **Modells**, during which the 39-year-old shadowboxed, got a nice sweat going, and then set many hearts aflutter by taking off his shirt, revealing a sick physique for a man half his age, Sergio's promoter **Lou DiBella** worked the phone regarding the phone call his office got that morning.

Team Dibella was given word that no boxer would be allowed to wear a knee brace, and thus the supportive sheath Martinez was planning to wear on his knees would not be allowed on fight night. The promoter put in a call to the new NYSAC executive director, David Berlin, and forcefully but politely asked why this issue was popping up so late in the game.

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WBC champ Martinez took questions from the media, while **HBO** cameras caught footage for their second installment of their 24/7 docu-mercial series, and fans clutched photos and gloves for the 51-2-2 hitter to sign. He told us that he was planning to wear a sheath on both knees, but that he felt, physically, better than 100%. His left knee, which had undergone surgery last year, leaving him on crutches for seven months, is feeling more than fine. The braces would be on for support, he told the keyboard tappers.

Or not.

Not long after the Modells session broke, DiBella informed Martinez of the NYSAC ruling. "Sergio is pissed," DiBella told me at 3:30 PM. "He's really pissed off. If there is a rule, why was no one ever informed? And what's the rationale?" DiBella is of the mindset that NBA and NFL athletes wear them, and they are not performing enhancing.

I reached out to the NYSAC and emailed their media relations department. A spokesman answered thusly: "The New York State Athletic Commission (NYSAC) does not comment on the specifics of a fighter's health. Per NYSAC policy, as previously recommended by its Medical Advisory Board on 9/30/13, braces are not allowed during competition." He pointed me out to a video... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2NDZo7dr>, of a NYSAC medical advisory board meeting from Sept. 18, 2013, which posted on the DOS website on Sept. 20, 2013, with the portion starting at 27:20 being especially pertinent. "Knee braces in the ring" are being discussed, and the board tosses around the issue.

In the video, you can see the board talking about the fact that a brace might indicate a fighter's health might be not be 100%, and thus perhaps, its presence could indicate he or she shouldn't be licensed.

It seems to be a majority opinion that a brace wouldn't be a performance enhancer, among the board. The board then discusses making the allowance of a brace in-ring a case by case basis, and the issue is decided at 38:10, with the board deciding "no" on braces.

DiBella is irked and now mindful of the fact that it seems like his guy is being made to jump

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through hoops. The promoter told me he sees fighters wearing braces on his club shows...but now, before this mega-fight, the issue is raised and pertinent? Also, he wonders why his guy was asked to have an MRI, an extra procedure, done to prove his healthfulness..even though, he told me, his fighter has never had to end a fight because his knee gave out, and has never been medically suspended because of a knee injury.

"Are they picking on us?" he asked, rhetorically.

Dibella is mindful that MSG is seen as "Cotto's house," and wants to make sure that the "house fighter" isn't getting extra love and attention. He said he respects the NYSAC, the exec director David Berlin and the chair Melvina Lathan, but wants to make quite sure that his guy isn't getting the short end of a stick because Cotto is so beloved in NYC.

Cotto is promoted by Top Rank; one of their executives, Carl Moretti, said that Top Rank didn't drop a dime on the brace issue. He said maybe Cotto and trainer Freddie Roach saw Martinez wearing a brace on the first HBO 24/7. "We promise not to punch Sergio in the knee...only on the chin!" Moretti cracked.

Meanwhile, at Modells, aside from the BraceGate beef, DiBella was in a stellar mood, as he watched Sergio whirling about while hotting pads held by trainer **Pablo Sarmiento**. The promoter told his pal, chef

Chris Santos

, who was present watching the event, that he was over the moon, because the boxer looked so mobile. I grilled Martinez about his knee, his elbow, everything...he said, "I'm one hundred percent..and a little bit more," as Team Martinez' Nathan Lewkowicz translated.

Sergio was asked about the remark by Miguel Cottos' trainer Freddie Roach that Cotto would score a KO4 in NYC.

"Freddie is a good joke-teller," Martinez joshed.

The boxer made clear that he sees this fight as the most important of his career, and Cotto the

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toughest test to this point.

The most humorous part of the session came when Sergio was doing pads, and re-directed a person who veered too close to him as he danced and popped. That person happened to be DiBella, and Sergio lightly shoved Lou, saw it was Lou and not some random schmuck, and then greeted him. Both chuckled.

"Sergio looks good planting," the promoter whispered to Santos, and then noted that the same couldn't be said of Martinez right before his Oct. 1, 2011 scrap against Darren Barker, in AC. DiBella saw Martinez immobile right before and wondered what the heck was wrong. Advisor **Sampson Lewkowicz** told DiBella he'd been hurt a month before.

"You can hear the thud! His hands are fast...you can see his feet," DiBella pointed out. "I'm watching him now, and I don't have any doubt. I think he's faster, bigger, stronger, than Cotto, that should do it," the promoter said.

Dibella, as he was leaving Modells, said that this situation wasn't at all like GloveGate, that no one was threatening to pull out of the fight, and he noted that Sergio's knees are solid, so no brace is needed...but his implication was clear...just in case the judges are needed on Saturday, he'd like to make quite sure that in their heads, they are explicitly aware that the playing field must be even-Steven. That's all he wants, he said.

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amayseng says:

I also expect every fighter in the state of NY to be seized and searched prior to entering the ring for ANY ankle brace, support, sleeve or extra pair of socks that would increase stability....

this rule is stupid.

Radam G says:

Because of inadvertent-and-delivered knee bump and knocking, a kneebrace/supporter can

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indeed be classified as a boxing enhancement. And besides, there are written rules of allowed attire. Knee braces/supporters are not on the list. And the NYSAC will not give a waiver. That is unless Ser-Mart pays M-Co and the NYSAC a nice bribe.

Ser-Mart is trying to sneak a cheat over. It could be some type of electric current in those knee braces/supporters that may be giving Ser-Mart some type of extra edge.

You never know. You have smart-arse cheats lurking in the game with every trick of the trade.

One that comes to mind is the falling Angel "Memo" Heredia with his back to the future "Tales From The Crypts" syet that he had fed and injected into Marquez.

Who knows? Ser-Mart could a roid knee. Hehe! Holla!

Skibbz says:

Fair points, d'you guys think Martinez can dance around Cotto in the early rounds enough to make Cotto lose some heart?

deepwater2 says:

If Sergio does dance too much he will not win the round. He may land a few more punches than Cotto but no judge at MSG, with the crowd behind Cotto, will score the close rounds to Sergio. If Cotto comes forward and throws a punch and misses the crowd still goes wild. As long as Cotto is aggressive and the round is close, Cotto will get the round.

The fact that Sergio has a couple more hoops to jump through is also a disadvantage because he might get too emotional. Sweet Lou says he is pissed about not having the knee brace and being forced in taking additional tests. That is precious energy wasted. Cotto is relaxing and saving his energy for fight night.

Skibbz says:

Nervous toll has a great effect on a fighter, but I believe Martinez is mentally sound. He was fighting for sack loads of peanuts not too long ago, and I think he's tough enough to take it all. The knee brace isn't a good sign though..

Radam G says:

[QUOTE=Skibbz;54217]Fair points, d'you guys think Martinez can dance around Cotto in the early rounds enough to make Cotto lose some heart?[/QUOTE]

No! M-Co is going to tear his arse up from da jump. And now Ser-Mart cannot knee bump. He is in deep Kimchi. Holla!

The Commish says:

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Welcome to the job, Mr. Berlin.

-Randy G.

Skibbz says:

[QUOTE=Radam G;54238]No! M-Co is going to tear his arse up from da jump. And now Ser-Mart cannot knee bump. He is in deep Kimchi. Holla![/QUOTE]

I think Cotto's might have the heavier punches but Martinez can crack too. I think he'll meet fire with fire. Could be a great fight!

amayseng says:

I comply with the knee brace especially if it has mechanical parts, like a Bledsoe brace...

However he should be able to use a compression sleeve or such....

just like many fighters wear on their ankles for improved stability

brownsugar says:

[QUOTE=Radam G;54216]Because of inadvertent-and-delivered knee bump and knocking, a kneebrace/supporter can indeed be classified as a boxing enhancement. And besides, there are written rules of allowed attire. Knee braces/supporters are not on the list. And the NYSAC will not give a waver. That is unless Ser-Mart pays M-Co and the NYSAC a nice bribe.

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Who knows? Ser-Mart could a roid knee. Hehe! Holla![/QUOTE]

LOL.... he said Ser-Mart (like Serve Mart),... and an electrical current delivering knee brace in the same post.... you really went deep on that one RG.

thegreyman says:

[QUOTE=Skibbz;54229]Nervous toll has a great effect on a fighter, but I believe Martinez is mentally sound. He was fighting for sack loads of peanuts not too long ago, and I think he's

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Yeah nervousness is incredibly sapping on the energy. It makes you tense, and when you're tense, energy is being burned even when you're relatively inactive.

I wonder if, if indeed his knee is a problem and it's on his mind, SM could be distracted by concerns about his knee holding up for the duration of the fight.

Skibbz says:

[QUOTE=amayseng;54249]I comply with the knee brace especially if it has mechanical parts, like a Bledsoe brace...

However he should be able to use a compression sleeve or such....

just like many fighters wear on their ankles for improved stability[/QUOTE]

I agree I think he should be allowed to wear a compression sleeve.

@Grey I'm sure Martinez knows that he can't let his knee get the better of him, but you can't control injuries you can only stop them from getting worse. I wonder if his team have the expertise to get him as close to his peak as he can be without damaging his injuries too much. It's possible with the right type of exercises but we don't know the full story... I'll still side with the Champ though.

brownsugar says:

I wouldn't be surprised if Martinez gave him a worse beating for objecting to the knee brace. These type of adversities tend to motivate a fighter more than mere trash talk or the allure of legacy.

And one thing I like about Martinez is..... The nastier he gets... The better he fights.

This fight is going to end in a Knock Out.

Skibbz says:

[QUOTE=brownsugar;54279]I wouldn't be surprised if Martinez gave him a worse beating for objecting to the knee brace. These type of adversities tend to motivate a fighter more than mere trash talk or the allure of legacy.

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It is looking like a really juicy fight, I must admit it's got more in it than I expected when the fight was first announced. I see Cotto going down, will he decide not to get up or will he bite down and rise to the challenge... Not too long till we find out!

amayseng says:

[QUOTE=brownsugar;54279]I wouldn't be surprised if Martinez gave him a worse beating for objecting to the knee brace. These type of adversities tend to motivate a fighter more than mere trash talk or the allure of legacy.

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Absolutely, people forget just because Serg is humble and appreciative, he is a fighter and he does have that fire burning within... he takes disrespect and fuels his focus and determination with it.

I like it.

SM mid fight knock out