

# **MARYLAND STATE ATHLETIC COMMISSION**

## **MINUTES - WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2020**

On Wednesday, November 18, 2020, the Maryland State Athletic Commission meeting was called to order by Chairman David Norman at 3:01 p.m.. Present were the following: Chairman Norman; Commissioner Brian Boles; Commissioner David Shull; Greg Morgan, Commissioner, Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing (“O&P”), Maryland Department of Labor; John Papavasiliou, Deputy Commissioner, O&P, Maryland Department of Labor; Patrick Pannella, Executive Director; Eric London, Assistant Attorney General and Counsel; and Joe Koff, promoter representative for Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC. Absent: Commissioner Chuck Gast and Commissioner Lenny Moore. This was a virtual meeting due to COVID-19 pandemic public restrictions, with all Commission members and Commission staff calling in telephonically.

### **REMARKS BY JOE KOFF REPRESENTING ROH**

Joe Koff, the promoter representative for licensed promoter Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC (“ROH”), requested to speak to the Commission.

Mr. Koff stated that he wanted to “publicly thank” the Commission for its regulatory efforts in support of allowing ROH to return to holding professional wrestling events in the State of Maryland and during the pandemic.

Mr. Koff also recognized Chairman Norman, Commission Chief Physician Dr. John W. Stiller, M.D. and Executive Director Pannella for their combined leadership efforts in creating the Commission’s “COVID-19 Medical Protocols and Administrative Protocols for Professional Wrestling Events Without Spectators in Attendance”.

Mr. Koff noted that it was essential for ROH as a wrestling business to “keep our product current”.

Mr. Koff cited the close and ongoing working relationship which has been forged

between ROH and the Commission as the key to the ROH wrestling events held during the pandemic running both safely and smoothly. Mr. Koff added that “we seem to be getting a better cadence with each event”.

Mr. Pannella reported that the Commission continues to work to attempt to reduce promoter costs attendant to adhering to its COVID-19 testing protocols while at the same time maintaining its high standards of safety to protect wrestling participants.

**COMMISSION UPDATE ON TWO-DAY SERIES OF  
TAPED ROH WRESTLING MATCHES TO BE HELD  
WITHOUT SPECTATORS IN ATTENDANCE ON  
DECEMBER 11 -12, 2020 AT THE UMBC EVENTS CENTER**

The Commission held a discussion in regard to the two-day series of taped wrestling matches without spectators in attendance which is being promoted by licensed promoter Ring of Honor Wrestling Entertainment, LLC (“ROH”), being sanctioned by the Commission, and being held on December 11 - 12, 2020 at The University of Maryland Baltimore County (“UMBC”) Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland.

The Commission reaffirmed its intention to:

- (1) continue to interpret ongoing executive orders issued by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan pertaining to COVID-19 restrictions within the State of Maryland; and
- (2) monitor any additional COVID-19 restrictions which Baltimore County, the jurisdiction where the upcoming ROH wrestling event is occurring, and other Maryland counties have the authority and discretion to impose.

Chairman Norman, Counsel London and Executive Director Pannella all reviewed the most recent such COVID-19 executive order issued by Governor Hogan, and concurred that Governor Hogan’s executive orders do not appear to prevent the continued conduct of wrestling events without spectators in attendance from taking place.

**PASSING OF LOCAL PROFESSIONAL WRESTLER**

## **RICHARD “RJ” MEYER – “BRUISER” – NOVEMBER 16, 2020**

Executive Director Pannella provided the Commission with the following report.

The Commission held a moment of silence in honor of Richard “RJ” Meyer, a popular professional wrestler based in the Baltimore area who passed away on November 16, 2020 after a long and brave battle against leukemia. He was 44 years old.

Mr. Meyer, whose wrestler name was “Bruiser”, had a lengthy career spanning over 18 years with the Maryland Championship Wrestling / “MCW” local independent wrestling promotion. He also served as head trainer at the MCW Pro Wrestling Training Center located in Joppa, Maryland.

Executive Director Pannella had many behind-the-scene interactions with Mr. Meyer at Commission-sanctioned MCW wrestling events. Mr. Pannella noted that Mr. Meyer was passionate about professional wrestling, was very cooperative in addressing Commission regulatory concerns, and “always kept his word”. For these reasons, Mr. Pannella referred to him as “The Mayor of MCW” as others fondly have.

Mr. Pannella noted, further, that Mr. Meyer was highly-respected by his peers in the wrestling industry and by wrestling fans alike.

## **APPROVAL OF COMMISSION MINUTES**

Commission minutes for the Commission meeting held on October 21, 2020, which were previously distributed to Commission members for review, were discussed.

Upon a motion by Commissioner Shull, and seconded by Commissioner Boles, the Commission voted unanimously (2-0) to approve the October 21, 2020 minutes of the Commission.

## **DEPARTURE OF COMMISSIONER JOHN PAPAVALIOU**

Executive Director Pannella announced that John Papavasiliou, O&P Deputy

Commissioner within the Maryland Department of Labor, is leaving to take a new position with the Maryland Department of Commerce.

Mr. Pannella praised Deputy Commissioner Papavasiliou for his strong interest in, and unwavering commitment, to both the Commission and fighter safety.

Chairman Norman stated that Deputy Commissioner Papavasiliou has been a “tremendous source of support” to the Commission and has always been “available to give us his guidance”.

Chairman Norman stated that Deputy Commissioner Papavasiliou has attended a large number of Commission-sanctioned events during his long tenure as in his position.

Mr. Pannella noted that Deputy Commissioner Papavasiliou was always willing to assist Commission staff in the performance of their regulatory duties at Commission-sanctioned events, and that he even “stepped in” for Mr. Pannella in overseeing the regulation of a MMA event when a boxing event was being held simultaneously.

Commissioner Morgan thanked Deputy Commissioner Papavasiliou for the warm welcome which he provided to Commissioner Morgan upon his arrival to O&P and for the valuable information and advice which he has provided to Commissioner Morgan since that point in time.

Counsel London thanked Deputy Commissioner Papavasiliou for his exemplary service to all O&P boards and commissions.

The Commission and Commissioner Morgan wished Deputy Commissioner Papavasiliou the best of success in his future endeavors.

Deputy Commissioner Papavasiliou thanked the Commission and Commissioner Morgan for their well wishes.

Deputy Commissioner Papavasiliou thanked Mr. Pannella for his dedication to, and “long hours” spent working for, the Commission.

Deputy Commissioner Papavasiliou stated that “one of the highlights of [his] entire career was to be associated with the talented group of regulators” comprising the Commission. He noted that it was a pleasure for him to be present behind the scenes and to witness firsthand the detailed regulatory operations of the Commission.

### **REMARKS BY COMMISSIONER GREG MORGAN**

Commissioner Morgan reported that he enjoyed attending day one of the two-day series of taped wrestling matches without spectators which was promoted by licensed promoter ROH, sanctioned by the Commission, and held on October 16 - 17, 2020 at The UMBC Events Center in Catonsville, Maryland.

Commissioner Morgan explained that he visited the wrestlers’ dressing rooms, spoke with several wrestlers and a referee about their personal experiences with the Commission’s COVID-19 testing protocols, and observed several wrestling matches being regulated by the Commission.

Commissioner Morgan stated that he was looking forward to attending boxing events and MMA events at the point in time in the future when these Commission-sanctioned are once again held in the State of Maryland.

Citing the “passion” which Executive Director Pannella has for his job, Commissioner Morgan said that he is excited to experience the Commission’s regulatory efforts involving combative sports in person.

Chairman Norman noted that, once Commissioner Morgan has such an opportunity, he will gain a fuller understanding of Commission operations at boxing events and MMA events and “what the Commission gets to experience and enjoy”.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Upon a motion by Commissioner Shull, and seconded by Commissioner Boles, the Commission voted unanimously (2-0) to adjourn the meeting at 3:28 p.m..

**Patrick Pannella**  
**Executive Director**