

# Effects of boxing on the mind

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## Content

1. Abstract
2. Introduction
3. Decision Making and Critical Thinking
4. A Battle with Fear
5. Positive and Negative affect scale (PANAS)
6. Interesting Finds using the PANAS Scale
7. Therk Side
8. Conclusion
9. Review of literature
10. Bibliography

## Abstract

*In this paper I want to look at how the sport of boxing can affect the mind, to look at this I have taken sports psychology to find out what happens when a fighter is going through while training and taking into account all the personal experience of many other fighters, so to do this task I will be taking a survey and asking them about how they feel when they train every day and mainly the effect it has on them when they win or lose a match after months of training. To understand how it really makes a fighter feel I will be administering the Positive and Negative affect scale (PANAS) on many boxers who are on the amateur and professional level. The paper is going to be focusing on how their can be negative and positive affects in the mind especially after a match that can be won or lost in a fight. There are already many psychological benefits in this sport as it has been proven in many papers but I want to do my own work by accessing the Positive and Negative affect scale (PANAS) scale on my own friends who are all boxers, as many of them have been through a lot they will definitely have lots to share and give us an understanding on how they have felt or changed over the years of practicing boxing.*

## Introduction:

Physical activity is very important for a human being, now days many people prefer a lot of fast foods and sweets to full fill their need for hunger, while this can cause a person to feel good in to long run it is very bad and can cause a lot of health issues by which a person's life span can decrease drastically if this becomes a habit or happens consistently every day. In this age of living there are so many sport activities to get involved in and to stay fit, but many people lose their ways and end up putting on unhealthy weight and eat all kinds of junk food every day and have no diet plan what's so ever. The sport I want to talk about in my paper is the sport of boxing which is according to me and speaking on behalf of many people, a sport which is really very challenging and we have to be mentally and physically prepared. The sport boxing has affected me in a good way, it has taken me down a road of good mental health, strength, endurance and just a lot of happiness and joy. Being consistent in such a sport and having the right diet can seriously change someone's life. The most interesting and important part of this sport is the mental affects it has on a person. I for one have a very good and bad experience of this sport because it takes you through hell for the first few months, when I first took up this sport for the first 2 months I was in excruciating pain and it took me a maximum of around 6 months to just get used to the amount of cardio which is been performed in the club. My coach always tells me that the pain is temporary so just keep going to reap the benefits, I always take this seriously and the moment I feel like giving up his words would always play in my head. This sport is also known as a trash talking sport as the fighters who will be facing each other try to embarrass or mentally try to kill them, this is war and the only way someone is going to get through is if they have a controlled and focused mind set. There are many benefits while practicing such a sport as the physical benefits can go from good hand and eye coordination, improving cardio vascular system, balance, endurance, etc and the mental effects can be better concentration, confidence, a stress buster,

self-awareness, etc. this game especially is a game of the mind as there will be many fighters who will trash talk their opponent to break their mental health and peace of mind. Trash talking has always been a strategy for fighter to get the upper hand in a match, it has always been a part of boxing for decades and one of the most famous and best trash talkers of boxing was Muhammad Ali. He was a very big influence in boxing as he was so good at trash talking that he used it and his skills to beat many great champions of the century. So, trash talking is mainly used to help fighters to get into the heads of their opponents, many fighters love to use this mental game as it can increase their chances of winning if their opponents are not mentally prepared and this is where sports psychology helps us to understand more deeply about the psychological warfare that goes on in the mind. Many boxers of the years have fallen prey to such a tactic that has been going on for a long time, many people also say that the mind is very important and should be controlled. A very good example I can give you about a strong and weak mindset is when Conor McGregor a really iconic fighter who is also the best in trash talking had his fight against Jose Aldo who was holding the championship belt and no one could defeat him, the days that were leading to their upcoming match Mc Gregor was constantly trash talking Aldo which was a very horrible thing as he disrespected his country, parents, friends, etc. all this talk got clogged up in Aldo mind and when the bout had started weeks later, Aldo was so tensed and under pressure were he could not concentrate or think straight and he then lost the fight in just 9 seconds and this was the fastest knock out. This is what happens when a person is distracted and has been a victim to trash talkers. Now I want to talk about how a strong mindset works and how it can be indestructible. The same fighter Conor McGregor had a bout with Khabib Nurmagomedov, weeks before their bout as you know McGregor started to trash talk his opponent and this time, he took it too far as he spoke about his religion, Khabib is a devoted Muslim and he follows his religion sincerely as he does not drink or smoke, he just eats, sleeps, trains and worships Allah. So, McGregor is talking trash about his father, religion, country, etc. khabib still does not lose his focus and concentration, as their bout had begun weeks later, khabib kept it all together and finished McGregor by round 2. This tells us so much about mindset, 2 different fighters fought against the same fighter that was Mc Gregor, and many other fighters were also victim to McGregor's trash talking, but Khabib did not fall prey to his mind games and went strong in his bout with McGregor. This tells us a lot about the difference with a strong and a weak mindset, as both the fighters faced McGregor but one was able to focus on just one thing and that was to beat McGregor and not let him win the fight his way.

### **Decision Making and Critical Thinking:**

There is a lot of difference when people have their boxing match some people change in ways that they did not think will be possible. Being in this sport for such a long time I have my own experience and the experiences of other fighters. In my experience boxing is a really lonely sport as it helps you build up many aspects of your life including your concentration, confidence, self-awareness, your overall health, etc, but for me it has got me detached from the world and many people also ask me "why don't you hang out with us?" or "why do you always stay by yourself and ignore your friends?", for me personally after I joined this sport it has got my mind clear and I have a whole new perspective of the world. For me it got me thinking of the circle in which I have my friends and many other people and I realized that 90% of people in my life are with me just because they want something out of me and don't genuinely want to be with me. Doing a small survey with most of my friends in the boxing club, most people had the same opinion, one person responded saying that he prefers being alone and have no distractions, another friend who has been very consistent to practice said he used to go partying and socializing with many people but now he just like to be alone and have no friends and he also stated that the best company he has ever had till now was his own self as company, another friend of mine also said that after 2 years of boxing he has been in the best shape of his life and he is able to think clearly for once in his whole life and I saved the best for last as this is a twist, my other friend told that he enjoyed his time so much in boxing that he wanted to just enjoy being with others and spreading joy. Those were just four of the responses I have noted down as the list is quiet long, most of the people who I have taken the survey on were all very lonely, but they did not hate it as loneliness refers to when someone wants to make friends but is unable to do that instead they stay by themselves as introverts, but the people who I had taken a survey on said they were perfectly happy being lonely as they enjoyed their own company instead of hanging out with friends or socializing. Many boxers around the world will definitely have this feeling as boxing is a one-man sport and the fighter stands alone till the end of the round, they understand at an early stage in their boxing career that even if they are tired in the middle of the rounds in the end, they have to pick themselves alone as no one will be there to help them. This feeling of being alone is just amazing and it helps you be independent.

### **A Battle with Fear:**

My next point is the ring, the ring is life for many boxers as once a fighter steps in the ring they feel the pressure of the moment where some people can take it and the others can't. Many fighters' life changes after their first

boxing match or every match they fight can affect them in a very different way. The famous heavy weight champion of the world who was Mike Tyson was the baddest man to ever walk the planet once said that when he walks closer and closer to the ring for his bout, he gets more and more confident and once he sets foot inside the ring he feels like God and no one can do anything to him. Unlike sports like cricket, basketball, etc which are all a team sport, the team members have company and their team members will be there to support and guide them and talk them out of their fears, but with boxing all you have to know is that 99% of the time you will be alone and no one to talk you out of your fear, it is you who has to make up your mind into how you are going to face your fear and learning to get up by yourself after being knocked out is a very crucial part. Now when talking about the affects boxing has when you win or lose a match it varies from people to people. Personally, when I had lost the first ever match, I had in my life I was very hurt as I had sacrificed a lot for 5 months, I had to diet to lose lot of weight as I stayed hungry, I had run 3 miles every day and trained a lot hard. After I lost the match, I had a break down for like a month where I did not want to talk to anyone I was like a popular loner because it had hurt me that deep. Then later I realised that I can work much harder for my next fight, so I wiped my tears and gone for practice regularly. After that I had this sudden burst of confidence where I felt I could do anything so I trained more harder, meditated and just putting in the work. Later I felt I was so clear headed and I could think straight that when I took part in my next match, I was able to come out strong and win. When my friend had his first match, he came out victorious and he felt good after getting that gold medal around his neck, but after a few days he stopped coming for practice and then I saw him two months later I couldn't believe it he had gained a lot of weight and I asked him why he had stopped coming in for practice and he told me that the one medal he had one was more than enough and he thought he would let himself go. Naturally he had a lot of strength and skills but he could not stay disciplined and committed which lead him to that stage of his life.

### **Positive and Negative affect scale (PANAS):**

There are many scales and tests that are used for athletes to try and understand their mental state as people who are really great at a sport can get beat and the other athlete who is not very good at their sport can come out victorious, it all has to do so much of the mind and if they are confident enough to win, they will and an athlete who is not that sure or doubts themselves before a performance they might have a chance of losing. But because there are many psychological tests out there In this next part, to understand how boxers feel and the emotions they are going through, I have set a test in which I will be administering the Positive and Negative affect scale (PANAS) on 25 different people who are all practicing the sport of boxing and the subjects vary differently as few are amateur who have been training just for weeks or a few months and the others are professionals who have been practicing this sport for about 5 to 10 years and we can see the long term effects of the sport of people with a whole lot of experience. The panas scale helps us understand if a person is feeling or thinking in a positive or negative way, this also helps us understand if the person has a positive or a negative take on life.

### **Interesting Finds using the PANAS Scale:**

Firstly, the subjects were asked to be seated comfortably and were handed out the scale in which they would be given different emotions such as anger, upset, strong, etc and they would have to rate themselves from Very slightly or not at all, A little, Moderately, quite a bit and extremely. So, according to the subject they have to rate themselves on how strongly they feel about these emotions and are asked to be very honest while answering the questionnaire. Most of the subjects felt comfortable to complete the questionnaire at their home and give it the next day and that was fine because when the subject is comfortable in their own space, they would be very honest with their answers. This test which is the Positive and Negative affect scale (PANAS) is very appropriate for this paper as it might help us understand how people feel emotionally, whether they have a positive take on life or a negative, as I have seen most boxers go into a pit of sadness when they train so hard and still don't reap the benefits of winning a tournament. It can be very difficult for a person and would be even harder for other people to understand what they are going through. Coming back to the test that had taken place, the 25 different boxers that the scale was administered on were very happy to find out their results as they wanted to know if they were actually positive or negative in their minds. There were a 4 questionnaire that stood out according to me, one was a professional boxer who is my coach and when he completed his test and when I added up the scoring, I was shocked to see the results. This was because he is a very grumpy person who would never talk much and would always be firm with us in our practice. When I added up his score, it showed me that he had a very positive take on life, for a person who is always very quiet and only does his job of teaching his students and then after classes are over, he would again distance himself, I was actually shocked on seeing his scores. The reason for that is being that he would enjoy his own company and doesn't want the company of others, he said he preferred to be alone and just enjoy life on his own terms, he also said that he doesn't care much about what others think of him and this is a man who has been a professional boxer for about 10 years.

The next subject I want to talk about is a person who has known to be very happy and kind to others, when I saw his questionnaire and added his score, I was even more shocked because once I added up the total it showed me that he had a negative take on life. So, I was thinking maybe he had depression but that was not the case as when I had asked him the next day and told him the score he was not surprised because he told me that he is suffering from a traumatic experience from the past few months and nothing is going on the way he wants it to be in his life. The month before that he had lost a match and failed his tests too, he told me that the situations in his life is his problems and he has to face it all by himself, so he told me that because I am going through such a rough time in my life it doesn't mean that I have to spoil others day too and he told me the best way to deal with that is just to keep a smile on your face and just be kind to people as we need to be the reason someone else keeps smiling. This kept me thinking that what a person is going through in their life are dealt with in different ways and the subject dealt with his issues in a way that just being kind and keeping a smile on your face to hide all the demons that you are battling within yourself can make a big difference. Even I did not know that he was going through a lot until I took the Positive and Negative affect scale (PANAS) test on him.

The next subject that I had administered the test was on my friend who had just started boxing and it has been over 2 weeks since he has joined. He is a very quiet person and has not yet got the wear the gloves all he does is workout till he is ready to wear the glove and is a complete beginner. So, he was a very nice person and when he had completed his test, I added up the scores and it displayed a sign of moderate happiness which can be interpreted as a positive attitude towards life. Mostly every one score the test the same way as having a positive take on life. So, to mention the 21 people out of 25 I am writing this down.

I have saved the best for last as this subject I have known for about 8 years and this person was the reason I have joined the sport. The subject was a very shy and a very anti-social person, over the years I myself have seen a big change in him, before the subject had joined the sport, he was a very awkward person and never got along with anyone but over the years he grew so confident that now he has a really good stable social life, the subject has so many friends and has found a very positive way of dealing with life. He told me that after he had joined the sport it had changed him in ways that he couldn't even imagine, he has fought many boxing matches and each fight that he had fought were he had won and lost, that had thought him so many lessons in life and he would never give up. So, when I had administered the test on the subject and when I had calculated the scores I was not surprised as the subject scores showed that he had a very positive perspective of life, he never cared what others said and he was so filled with confidence that he would go after what he wanted and achieved it. I for one knew the subject for years and from the day he joined boxing that was 8 years ago and till now, I myself can see such a big difference. All I want to add to this subject's result is that he was completely dedicated to the sport, being consistent and eating the right food and in terms of diet too.

### **The Dark Side:**

So long we have been discussing the positive and negative aspects of the sport of boxing and the way our brains react to it. But now let's discuss the dark side of the sport, it leads to few lives long problems faced when the boxers get older. The best example to use in this case is the life story of the greatest boxer of all time and that was Muhammad Ali. He was a beast in the ring, but as he got older his lifelong sparring sessions got the best of him as he had developed the Parkinson's disease which a person loses all the bodily controls and the cant stop shaking and have speech impairment. According to doctors this happened to him because of all the punches that he has absorbed all these years as a professional boxer. But he had passed away at the age of 72 because of Parkinson's. Another story is of Prichard colon, a man who had great ambitions but could not make it to see his whole career completed, this man had many amateur records and had the chance to go professional as he ended his amateur career with the record of 170 wins out of 215 matches and this was when he decided to go professional. After he decided to go professional, he had achieved a massive record of 16 continuous wins which would all change one night. At the night of October 17, 2015, he fought the match where colons were knocked out 2 times and while the match was being called off, he was vomiting and feeling very uncomfortable and dizzy, while he was taken to the hospital, he was unconscious and the doctors said that he was suffering from internal bleeding and he was into a coma. He came out of his coma after 221 days and he was never the same, as he was a paralysed person with no ability to talk and he was in a vegetable state. But not all boxers suffer from this condition there are many boxers who are professional fighters who are old now and are perfectly fine, it's a very few people who suffer major consequences of the punches absorbed by the brain and this can lead to internal bleeding of the brain or a brain hem rage. Many people aspire to be the best at the sport but not all of them makes it to the end, there will always be people who are better at you in the sport and people need to learn to accept that. But it's not bad to play the sport it's just that few people have faced big time

consequences practicing the sport, there are all kinds of mental benefits of the sport and it has a very good impact especially to our hearts as the sport encourages a lot of cardio.

### Conclusion:

Mostly people who play any sport get this rush of dopamine rush to the body, even in the case of boxing, the workout is just one hour a day but through out that one hour the training will suck the life out of a person, but the case is considering the after effects of sweating out and having so much fun while practicing is when people usually tend to feel the feel-good hormones that are released to the brain. Usually there are many long-term health conditions also when we talk about boxing and that can be very dangerous if we are fighting people every day. This pressure of the punch taken is actually affecting the brain in a bad way too as the brain floats around in a fluid within the skull, as a person punches you the effect of the punch would have already taken place as the brain would have hit the skull back and forth with that pressure received by the punch and what this does to the brain is that it breaks down the neuron transmitters wired in the brain and years of this can leave a person to long term problems such as Parkinson's disease, paralysis of the brain, etc. so, bottom line is that there is not only a dark side of the sport to be worried about but there is a whole bright side of the sport which people have explored and I for one encourage many people to practice and feel the benefits of the sport. Overall, the sport is very beneficial for a good mental health and being physically fit, we can understand a lot and we really start thinking critically, from the examples shown above we can try and understand ourselves and the people in our life. We can also learn to be very independent and the main goal to achieve all these benefits of the sport is consistency and being completely dedicated in training.

### Review of Literature:

1. The article referring to the Mental Toughness in Boxing by Dr Pete Olusola, talks about the mental toughness when entering the sport and how to develop or build a mind of mental toughness, how to cope with the mental aspects of the sport and how to build up your concentration in the game.
2. A study done by Dr Thomas di Virgilio, says that there can be short-term impairments in brain-to-muscle communication and decreased memory performance caused by routine sparring sessions, as I mentioned in my paper that there is a possibility of ending up with a long-term problem of sparring and this usually occurs during old age.
3. An article published by Daniel Gallan says about the importance of trash talking and the power of trash talking. It's very important because it has the power to influence the mind so heavily that it can cripple a man from the inside. No matter how strong you are physically, if you are not mentally tough you will be a victim to the other side of the sport and that is trash talking.

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