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Can boxing be a good career move?

By Maxine Boersma



Nick Clegg, UK deputy prime minister, says he enjoys kickboxing “to get stuff out of my system” – and it seems he is not alone. A growing number of individuals in high-pressure jobs are citing boxing as a route to physical and mental fitness.

In spite of health and injury fears, many are taking to the ring, especially from the finance sector.

Even some doctors are saying white-collar boxing is a way of relieving tension and “can strengthen skills you need in the workplace, especially in the boardroom and on the trading floor”.

Its recent popularity among those in finance is said to have started at the celebrated Gleason’s Gym in New York in the early 1990s, reaching London via Wall Street around 2000. The 1999 movie *Fight Club* added to boxing’s profile and appeal.

For Simon Hayes, former City of London analyst turned headhunter, white collar boxing is far from new. He leads the financial services board practice at Odgers Berndtson but also works on finding candidates for high-profile sporting positions.

“Boxing has been around since the 1980s when boxing dinners were popular,” says Mr Hayes. “Sport has had a centuries-long association with the City and boxing has been a regular forum for charity dinners and is an integral part of the City’s social calendar.

“I have seen it increase in the past three years in the City as work has become more demanding, with inevitable stress.”

He says job candidates who include participation in white-collar boxing on their CV should be prepared to answer questions about it – warning that any non-work activities mentioned should be long-term interests.

“If you’ve only boxed once, do not include it,” he advises. “If you take it seriously, discuss how the sport improves your ability to connect with others – to have something interesting to raise outside work.”

He also suggests workers have an honest discussion with their employer if boxing, or any other extracurricular interest, is a significant part of their weekly commitment.

“An employer will want to know how sporting activities will fit into your working week. These should be appropriately balanced,” Mr Hayes says. “Different employers will have different views, with some banks encouraging employees to take on additional activities, while some are adamant that outside commitments detract from the core job.”

Mr Hayes suggests boxers point out the benefits of the sport to employers – the networking opportunities it offers and potential fundraising work.

They might also stress the health benefits. Michael Sinclair, clinical director of City Psychology Group, says white-collar boxing is “great for cardiovascular fitness and for developing stamina, strength, dexterity and hand-eye co-ordination” and can increase productivity and perseverance.

He says: “The sport enhances skills, including endurance, strategic thinking and the planning of tactical moves, and it also helps develop confidence in precise execution. It helps you stay one step ahead. And it teaches humility, discipline, focus, concentration and respect for your opponent, which are also crucial for that winning state of mind.”

But Dr Sinclair says precautions are essential and warns against complacency. He advises boxers to protect themselves physically and psychologically. “It is a very challenging sport that is taxing on the body and mind,” he says. “It requires a significant level of physical fitness and psychological flexibility. Before you start, get a medical check-up from your GP and seek the advice of an experienced boxing

trainer.”

He says it is important for new entrants to begin slowly under the supervision of a trainer and ensure they rest between fights, while keeping a healthy balance between boxing and other leisure pursuits and exercise.

“Make sure your life doesn’t become all about boxing and winning the next fight,” he says. “Learn strategies to relax and manage your stress and adrenalin levels. Mindfulness can be a great tool to do all this and to ensure you keep mentally and emotionally aware.”

James Brewins, a partner at a City firm, Alesco Risk Management Services, says he began boxing to get fit.

The 28-year-old believes boxing is in his blood, as he took up the sport when he was seven, encouraged by his grandfather’s record as an RAF boxing champion 40 years earlier.

“I had a few bouts as a kid then took part in my first adult fight in 2009, with the City Warriors boxing club. This club attracts surveyors, bankers, lawyers and civil servants as members,” he says.

In 2010, the City Warriors club asked him to set up a club for Lloyd’s, the insurance market, as a charity fundraising venture. Lloyd’s Boxing Club, run in association with the City Warriors, was created and has since raised more than £15,000 for two charities – Cardiac Risk in the Young and the MPS Society.

“I managed to attract the first 15 members quickly because interest in white-collar boxing had grown massively in the previous 10 or 15 years – among women as well as men,” says Mr Brewins. Lloyd’s Boxing Club now has 45 members, with ages ranging up to almost 60. One member has even graduated to compete at official amateur boxing level.

Mr Brewins trains twice a week and has won six of his seven fights over four years. Events consist of three two-minute rounds and participants wear 16oz gloves and protective headgear.

He says: “Boxing makes me fitter, more goal-focused and is a great discipline. My employer has been very supportive because I’ve always been able to balance work commitments.

“The benefits are not just physical,” he adds. “Boxing is also great for networking, meeting people you would never normally come across. It also raises your profile in the sector.”

Then he smiles: “Sometimes, not knowing who you are going to meet in the ring can be tricky as you could at some point end up doing business with them in the London market. But then it’s a fantastic ice breaker.”

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