

Boys' fight in cage 'very barbaric' says Jeremy Hunt

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BBC VIDEO LINK <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15016216>

The organiser of the event in Preston said it did not breach any rules and insists children's safety was not compromised

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A fight between two boys watched by adults at a cage-fighting event has been described as "very barbaric" by the Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt.

The boys, aged eight and nine, were filmed wrestling in a cage at a Labour club in Preston in front of about 250 adults on 10 September.

Club manager Michelle Anderson said the boys were not put in danger.

But the deputy leader of Preston's Labour-led council called on the club not to stage any more junior fights.

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I would liken it to a game of chess, it's about outsmarting your opponent"

End Quote Spokesman for Sharefight Company which filmed event

A video posted on YouTube showed the boys had no protective padding or head gear at the event at Greenlands Labour Club. They were also seen receiving medical attention.

'Share the shock'

"Getting more young people doing sport is great but I do ask myself whether it really does have to be in a cage," Mr Hunt said.

"It just feels to me, it feels very barbaric and I know there are concerns about children that young doing a sport like that.

"I think if adults choose to do it, that's one thing. I suppose I do share some of the shock.

"We have to recognise that sport has a very, very important role but I think with this particular sport, I think some people will ask some questions."

Councillor John Swindells, deputy leader of Preston City Council, who said the council would be reviewing the club's licence, said: "I would ask Greenlands Labour Club not to put on any future cage fighting events involving children.

Nick Hartley said the fight was "not one bit dangerous"

"I will certainly be asking the licensing committee to tighten the conditions so that such events involving children are not allowed to happen in Preston.

"I, and many people in Preston, cannot just ignore or condone this cage fighting event involving children taking place in our city."

Club manager Michelle Anderson, 39, earlier said the boys were not cage-fighting but "grappling".

She said the boys "loved it" and were not in danger.

The father of one of the boys, Nick Hartley, said his son had not been at risk

"He loves the sport. It's not one bit dangerous, it's a controlled sport," he said.

'Threat of injury'

But the activity has been criticised by children's charity the NSPCC.

It said the the fight was "disturbing" and warned parents against allowing youngsters to take part in this sort of sport while they were developing.

The British Medical Association (BMA) said sports such as boxing and cage-fighting were "sometimes defended on the grounds that children learn to work through their aggression with discipline and control".

But it said many other sports, such as athletics, swimming, judo and football, "require discipline but do not pose the same threat of brain injury".



Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt said the event felt "very barbaric"

Sharefight, the company commissioned to film the event, said the video had been on the internet for two weeks without complaint.

It was taken down on Wednesday "out of respect" for parents and others who had shown concern, a spokesman said.

He said the event had taken place in a "safe environment" and under strict conditions.

"What took place was safer than what happens in judo clubs and rugby training grounds up and down the country," he said.

"People are reacting to the negative stereotype around cage-fighting and the setting within a cage, but a cage makes it safer for the participant because it stops them falling from the ring.

"The event involving the children was submission wrestling. Contact between the participants was restricted at all times.

"I would liken it to a game of chess, it's about outsmarting your opponent rather than overcoming them."

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