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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, with Rev Bill Crews, 2GB, 27 August 2017

Subject: Boxing and Brain Injuries

BILL CREWS: What do you make of the big Mayweather-McGregor fight? It's almost universally been covered in the news tonight with rapturous excitement, but all that glosses over the violence and damage that this sport causes. Dr Michael Gannon, President of the AMA, just how damaging is boxing to participants?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, boxing causes permanent injury to a significant proportion of people who undertake it as a pastime. The whole point of this pastime is to disable your opponent so that they can no longer continue by inflicting on them an acute brain injury, better known as concussion. And it's no surprise that with repetitive brain injury you sometimes see consequences, and we see that all the time in terms of Parkinsonism, dementia, and other forms of chronic brain injury.

BILL CREWS: Yeah. So does it concern you that this fight glamorises boxing?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, I think it's absolutely disgusting. This is brutality at a new level by combining the new so-called sport of MMA with boxing, and then the almost pornographic celebration of the purse of tens of millions of dollars and people around the world queuing up to watch two people belt the suitcase out of each other. I just don't get it, to be honest.

BILL CREWS: So what concerns me is that it normalises violence. We've seen all these drunken king hits and fights on the news over time, haven't we?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, we have, and it's not an unreasonable leap to make to say that it normalises this. I will not encourage my children to resolve any conflicts they have at school and beyond with the use of violence. It's not tolerated in any other place in society. We've seen, to a large extent, our football codes cleaned up. It is unacceptable anywhere else in life to try and belt someone in the head, and yet we have tens of thousands of people glued to TV screens to see who can get hurt the most.

BILL CREWS: It's obscene, isn't it?

MICHAEL GANNON: I think it is obscene. If you'll indulge me a personal comment, I was at Subiaco Oval in Perth this afternoon watching the last ever AFL game there – plenty of physical bravery on display, plenty of skill, plenty of application. Some hard hits, some blood spilt, but I can tell you the reason they're out there is not because they're trying to harm their fellow combatant. When it comes to boxing and the other so-called combat sports, that's the point – to cause a brain injury to your opponent. You know, I would like to think that in my lifetime we would see the end to this so-called sport.

BILL CREWS: I'm talking with Dr Michael Gannon from the AMA. Michael, in the '90s, boxing was really on the nose. There were even calls for it to be dumped from the Olympics. Should participation in it be encouraged or discouraged? You'd say discouraged, wouldn't you?

MICHAEL GANNON: I would say discouraged. Look, I've heard many arguments about the positive elements that boxing can produce in many of our communities in Australia and

beyond. So you're often taking kids off the street, to use that aphorism that's popular, and I think the fitness, the application, the training, they are all positives, but the inevitable thing is that if you start a nine year old or a 12 year old or even a 15 year old sparring, they will look up to the people elsewhere in the gym and somewhere along the line someone will suggest that they take it to the next level. And of course, the next level is to punch someone in the head. You can't do it anywhere else in polite society. It's something that appeals to the base instincts of a minority of the population and it's a form of brutality [indistinct] ...

BILL CREWS: [Interrupts] So Michael, what would you say to parents whose kids have seen this fight and say, oh, dad or mum, I want to go and do boxing? What advice would you give the parents?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, I think I would encourage them down another area where they can get fit, they can enjoy a physical contest, they can enjoy comradery. There are many other ways you can do that that doesn't involve blows to the head, and that's what we're ultimately talking about here. Of course, with the latest incarnation of the brutalism – the MMA – you can presumably try and injure other parts of the body. We've seen significant soft tissue injuries in other parts of the body; we've seen scrotal injuries in men; we've seen serious facial and jaw fractures with this, and you make a good point when you talk about what the so-called spectators do. They then go and ape it. They then go and act it out. There are just too many episodes of scuffles or more serious fights in and around the television screen and the live contests.

BILL CREWS: Well, god bless you, mate. Thanks so much for talking to us tonight.

MICHAEL GANNON: Alright. Pleasure, Bill.

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