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Dismay as Russian Boxing Orders Bikini Girls to Cover Up

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73% of respondents to a survey opposed the decision to clothe ring girls.

The announcement by a top industry promoter that boxing matches in Russia will no longer feature scantily clad women out of respect to Muslim fighters has sparked dismay in the sporting world.

An online survey by sports.ru showed that 73 percent of their readers were opposed to the decision to compel so-called ring girls to wear more clothes. The survey also carried a link to a picture of a female announcer, only her face visible, dressed in traditional clothing from the North Caucasus.

One commentator on sports.ru wrote: "the ring girls look better than the boxing 'show' itself. Why would you deprive the audience of this distraction by covering her up from head to toe?"

The reaction in other publications was similar. "Russian ring girls will be the most modest ring girls in the world. Now lovers of female beauty at a boxing match will be a bit sad ..." read a headline on Russian sport news site sport-weekend.com.

Even state-owned Rossiiskaya Gazeta, which carries official announcements and publishes all new laws passed in Russia, appeared to be dismayed by the new initiative. "It's difficult to imagine a boxing duel without the revealing attire of the ring girls," the paper wrote Tuesday.

The backlash was sparked after Andrei Ryabinsky, head of boxing promotion company Mir Boksa, which organizes most fights in Russia, said bikini-wearing girls would no longer be used at fights. Ring girls traditionally enter the boxing arena holding signs announcing the number of the upcoming round.

"Muslim boxers take to the ring, and we respect them. A boxing show is not the sort of place where there should be girls in bikinis," Ryabinsky said Tuesday, news agency TASS reported.

"This is a serious sporting event of an international level, and not a strip club. Therefore we decided to change the format so it is more civilized," Ryabinsky was cited by TASS as saying.

Boxing matches in the mainly Muslim republics of Russia's North Caucasus already use female announcers who do not wear bikinis, but who are dressed in traditional clothes. In some predominantly Muslim countries the practice of having female announcers at fights has been scrapped altogether.

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