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Suit: Woman goaded into amateur bout

The family of a woman who died says Toughman promoters were negligent.

By TOM ZUCCO, Times Staff Writer

Published September 23, 2003

TAMPA - A Bradenton mother of two who was killed during a recent Toughman competition was goaded into participating in "a barbaric, vicious, unregulated, bloody slugfest," her family said in a wrongful death lawsuit filed Monday.

Stacy Young, 30, signed a waiver before the fight that released organizers from liability. She also signed an affidavit stating she was physically fit and had trained for a minimum of 30 days prior to the fight.

But that training wasn't evident on the night of June 14, when she was knocked unconscious with just seconds left in her fight at Robarts Arena in Sarasota. She died two days later at Bayfront Medical Center.

The lawsuit, filed in Hillsborough Circuit Court, names Toughman founder Art Dore, his promotions company and the Toughman regulatory association Dore founded and controls. Also named are the Sarasota County Agricultural Fair Association, which approves events for Robarts Arena, and Ray Blackburn, a Wesley Chapel resident who refereed that night.

Blackburn was unavailable for comment. Joelle English, a spokeswoman for Dore's company, AdoreAble Promotions, said Dore had no comment.

"We're just looking everything over right now," English said.

Young's death renewed criticism of Toughman competitions, which have led to the deaths of at least 13 people since they began in 1979. At least four people have died in such competitions nationwide in the past year.

Toughman is banned in five states, and Dore has been sued at least twice before.

Another Toughman competition is scheduled for this weekend at the TECO Arena in Fort Myers.

"I know he has been sued," said Tampa attorney Greg Kehoe, who is representing the Young family. "But that doesn't affect us.

"Our claim is that they were negligent and didn't do everything possible to make this as safe as possible. We have a husband, Chuck Young, who lost his wife, and two little girls who lost their mom."

Young wasn't the only Toughman contestant to file a lawsuit Monday. Kehoe also is representing Tony Roten and his wife, Kelly, who claim Tony Roten suffered an

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"untold" number of blows to the head in three matches at the Sarasota competition.

After falling and being unable to defend himself in his third match, his wife attempted to stop the fight, but a police officer working security at the event held her back, the lawsuit says.

Roten, 30, lost consciousness, spent two days in intensive care and has been in the hospital five times since the fight. He has suffered brain damage, vision loss, and is walking with a cane, the lawsuit says.

Young, who was 5-7, 240 pounds and had never been in a boxing ring, tried to defend herself for most of her three-round bout against Sarah Kobie, a Sarasota cake baker who stands 5-11, weighs 185 pounds and had seven victories in seven fights since June 2002.

Ten seconds before the fight was to end, Kobie landed several punches to the back of Young's head. Young collapsed in the ring. She died two days later. An autopsy revealed the cause of death was blunt trauma to her head.

After a two-month investigation that ended Aug. 10, Sarasota police concluded no laws had been broken and the fight was an amateur bout. It also agreed with the Pinellas Medical Examiner's Office that Young's death was accidental.

But the investigation also noted that Kobie had an unbeaten record, and that the ring doctor was a physician's assistant. Blackburn, the referee, also told police he encouraged Young to give up before the final round. But the lawsuit claims Blackburn forced Young "to face off against Ms. Kobie once more in the center of the ring."

English, Dore's spokeswoman, said the lawsuits will not affect the Fort Myers Toughman competition scheduled for this weekend.

But it may soon be difficult to stage the events in Sarasota.

The Sarasota County Commission is scheduled today to take up the issue of Toughman competitions, and Commissioner David Mills said passage of an ordinance that would require strict guidelines - guidelines Mills said Toughman would have difficulty meeting - is likely.

Mills also sits on the board of the Sarasota Fair Association, which is not a part of the county government but is a defendant in the lawsuits.

"I'm disappointed they sued the Fair Association," Mills said. "Apparently, you can sue anybody in this day and age. We'll just respond and see what happens.

"But I hope nothing happens in Fort Myers like what happened here. It was a catastrophe."

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From Orlando Sentinel

Toughman fatality's kin sue 'slugfest'

By Vickie Chachere
The Associated Press

September 23, 2003

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A Sarasota man seriously injured in several Toughman bouts during the June 13-14 event in Sarasota also sued, saying he suffered brain damage after being mismatched with better fighters.

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The lawsuits come just days before Toughman stages its first Florida competition since Young's death. A two-day Toughman event will be held in Fort Myers this weekend.

"People need to know how dangerous these events actually are," said Tampa attorney Greg Kehoe, who is representing both the Young family and Roten. "Not only is the possibility of death a speculative issue, it's a reality."

Neither Dore, Blackburn nor Sarasota County fair officials immediately calls for comment.

Kehoe alleged in the lawsuit that the Toughman contests have a dangerous history and that neither Young nor Roten would have participated had they known the risk.

Four people have died in Toughman matches in the past year and 10 have died since Dore, of Bay City, Mich., founded the Toughman competition 24 years ago.

The lawsuit claims Young was induced into participating June 14 by event organizers who needed an opponent for Sarah Kobie, who had fought in other Toughman events. Kobie is a muscular, conditioned, 180-pound woman who was matched against the 240-pound Young, who had never been inside a boxing ring, the lawsuit said.

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Published Tuesday, September 23, 2003

Boxing Promoter Sued Over Injuries

By VICKIE CHACHERE
The Associated Press

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The lawsuits come just days before Toughman stages its first Florida competition since Young's death. A two-day Toughman event will be held in Fort Myers this weekend.

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Neither Dore, Blackburn nor Sarasota County fair officials immediately returned calls for comment.

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Roten or Young's fight or stop their opponents from hitting them when they were clearly outmatched.



The lawsuit claims Young was induced into participating June 14 by event organizers who needed an opponent for Sarah Kobie, who had fought in other Toughman events. Kobie is a muscular, conditioned 180-pound woman who was matched against the 240-pound Young, who had never been inside a boxing ring, the lawsuit said.

Young was told by organizers the event would be "safe and fun," and that "nobody is going to get hurt," and that "the worst that could happen was to get a broken nose," the lawsuit says.

Young collapsed after a threeminute fight with the younger, more able opponent. She died days later after being disconnected from life support.

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TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

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TALLAHASSEE DEMOCRAT

Suits filed against Toughman promoter

By Vickie Chachere

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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The lawsuits come just days before Toughman stages its first Florida competition since Young's death. A two-day Toughman event will be held in Fort Myers this weekend.

"People need to know how dangerous these events actually are," said Tampa attorney Greg Kehoe, who is representing both the Young family and the Rotens. "Not only is the possibility of death a speculative issue, it's a reality."

Dore, Blackburn and Sarasota County fair officials did not immediately return calls for comment.

Kehoe alleged in the lawsuit that the Toughman contests have a dangerous history and that neither Young nor Roten would have participated had they known the risk.

Four people have died in Toughman matches in the past year, and 10 have died since Dore, of Bay City, Mich., founded the Toughman competition 24 years ago.

Kehoe said he is naming Blackburn as a defendant because he did not stop either Roten's or Young's fight or stop their opponents from hitting them

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Roten, 30, suffered an "untold" number of blows to the head in three matches June 13 and 14, his lawsuit said.



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Two Tampa lawsuits filed against Toughman promoter

Tuesday, September 23, 2003

By [VICKIE CHACHERE](#), Associated Press

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Young was told by organizers the event would be "safe and fun," and that "nobody is going to get hurt," and that "the worst that could happen was to get a broken nose," the lawsuit says.

Young collapsed after a three-minute fight with a younger, better able opponent. She died days later after being disconnected from life support.

Police investigated her death, but said they could bring no charges under state law which has loopholes which allow Toughman competitions to operate unchecked.

Roten, 30, suffered an "untold" number of blows to the head in three matches on June 13 and 14, his lawsuit said. After falling and being unable to defend himself in his third match, his wife Kelly attempted to stop the fight herself, but a police officer working security at the event held her back, the lawsuit says.

Tony Roten lost consciousness, but the medical personnel on hand to aid him wasn't a doctor but a physician's assistant who was also working as the event's photographer, the lawsuit says.

Roten spent two days in intensive care and has been in the hospital five time since the bout. He has suffered brain damage, vision loss, back and leg pain and is walking with a cane, the suit says.

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Sports

Posted on Mon, Sep. 22, 2003

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"People need to know how dangerous these events actually are," said Greg Kehoe, who is representing the Young family and the Rotens. "Not only is the possibility of death a speculative issue, it's a reality."

Neither Dore, nor Sarasota County fair officials or the referee returned calls for comment.

Young, a 30-year-old mother of two, had entered the bout on an impulse when no opponent could be found for the only other woman to sign up, Sarasota Police Chief Peter Abbott said.

At 240 pounds, Young outweighed her opponent, cake baker Sarah Kobie by about 60 pounds. But witnesses said it was clear Young was outmatched from the opening bell. Kobie, 20, had fought in at least seven Toughman bouts and was undefeated, Sarasota detectives reported.

Young, pummeled by Kobie, collapsed in the ring shortly before the end of the third round and suffered a seizure. She was declared brain dead and disconnected from life support days later. The medical examiner ruled her death an accident.

Four people have died in Toughman matches in the past year and 10 have died since Dore founded the Toughman competition 24 years ago.

Toughman boxing events are held nationwide and are open to amateur boxers who compete for small prizes, such as jackets and trophies. Contestants sign forms indicating they have trained for the event, but in

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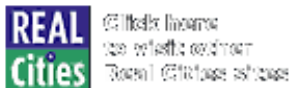
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Tuesday, Sep 23, 2003

The News-Sentinel

Posted on Mon, Sep. 22, 2003

Two lawsuits filed against promoter of Toughman boxing events

VICKIE CHACHERE

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. - The family of a woman killed in a Toughman boxing event sued the event's promoter Monday, calling the matches a "barbaric, vicious, unregulated, bloody slugfest."

The lawsuit seeks damages of more than \$15,000 in the death of Stacy Young after a Toughman event at the Sarasota County Fairgrounds in June. A second lawsuit seeks similar damages for a man, Tony Roten, who suffered brain damage at the same event.

The lawsuits name Toughman founder Art Dore of Bay City, Mich., his promotions company and the regulatory association he founded, along with the Sarasota County Agricultural Fair Association, which manages the fairgrounds, and the referee overseeing the matches.

"People need to know how dangerous these events actually are," said Greg Kehoe, who is representing the Young family and the Rotens. "Not only is the possibility of death a speculative issue, it's a reality."

Neither Dore, nor Sarasota County fair officials or the referee returned calls for comment.

Young, a 30-year-old mother of two, had entered the bout on an impulse when no opponent could be found for the only other woman to sign up, Sarasota Police Chief Peter Abbott said.

At 240 pounds, Young outweighed her opponent, cake baker Sarah Kobie by about 60 pounds. But witnesses said it was clear Young was outmatched from the opening bell. Kobie, 20, had fought in at least seven Toughman bouts and was undefeated, Sarasota detectives reported.

Young, pummeled by Kobie, collapsed in the ring shortly before the end of the third round and suffered a seizure. She was declared brain dead and disconnected from life support days later. The medical examiner ruled her death an accident.

Four people have died in Toughman matches in the past year and 10 have died since Dore founded the Toughman competition 24 years ago.

Toughman boxing events are held nationwide and are open to amateur boxers who compete for small prizes, such as jackets and trophies. Contestants sign forms indicating they have trained for the event, but in reality many have not trained nor boxed before.

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Toughman fatality's kin sue 'slugfest'

By Vickie Chachere | The Associated Press
Posted September 23, 2003

TAMPA -- The family of a woman killed in a Toughman boxing event sued the event's promoter and others Monday, calling the matches a "barbaric, vicious, unregulated, bloody slugfest."

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A Sarasota man seriously injured in several Toughman bouts during the June 13-14 event in Sarasota also sued, saying he suffered brain damage after being mismatched with better fighters.

The lawsuits, filed in Hillsborough Circuit Court, each seek unspecified damages of more than \$15,000 in the death of Stacy Young and the brain damage suffered by Tony Roten in the bouts at the Sarasota County Fairgrounds.

The lawsuits name Toughman founder Art Dore, his promotions company, and the Toughman regulatory association Dore also founded and controls. The Sarasota County Agricultural Fair Association, which manages the fairgrounds, and Raymond Blackburn, the referee overseeing the matches, were also sued.

The lawsuits come just days before Toughman stages its first Florida competition since Young's death. A two-day Toughman event will be held in Fort Myers this weekend.

"People need to know how dangerous these events actually are," said Tampa attorney Greg Kehoe, who is representing both the Young family and Roten. "Not only is the possibility of death a speculative issue, it's a reality."

Neither Dore, Blackburn nor Sarasota County fair officials immediately calls for comment.

Kehoe alleged in the lawsuit that the Toughman contests have a dangerous history and that neither Young nor Roten would have participated had they known the risk.

Four people have died in Toughman matches in the past year and 10 have died since Dore, of Bay City, Mich., founded the Toughman competition 24 years ago.

The lawsuit claims Young was induced into participating June 14 by event organizers who needed an opponent for Sarah Kobie, who had fought in other Toughman events. Kobie is a muscular, conditioned, 180-pound woman who was matched against the 240-pound Young, who had never been inside a boxing ring, the lawsuit said.

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Toughman event to continue despite lawsuits

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Recent tragedies spark legal action

By DERON SNYDER, dsnyder@news-press.com

Published by news-press.com on September 23, 2003

Two lawsuits filed Monday in relation to last summer's tragic Toughman boxing event in Sarasota won't stop this weekend's show at TECO Arena.

"We have a contract with these people," arena president Craig Brush said. "There's nothing illegal about what they're doing. They're renting the building from us and they have insurance. We have insurance, too.

"If I had to worry about potential lawsuits, we'd never open our doors."

The family of Stacy Young, who was killed during the June 13-14 boxing event at the Sarasota County Fairgrounds, and Tony Roten, who claims he suffered brain damage from his participation, filed suits in Hillsborough Circuit Court, each seeking unspecified damages of more than \$15,000.

The suits name Toughman founder Art Dore, his promotions company and the Toughman regulatory association, which he also founded and controls. The association that manages the fairgrounds and Raymond Blackburn, the referee overseeing the matches, were also sued.

TECO Arena will have a Toughman event on Friday and Saturday. It's the first Toughman competition in Florida since Young's death.

Steve St. John, the arena's vice president of operations, said Young's death led TECO Arena to add additional measures to its contract with Toughman promoters.

"We've put some special mandates on Toughman to make sure they have licensed medical doctors and licensed ring officials," St. John said. "That's part of the thing we've done to help with the cause."

Attempts to reach Toughman officials were unsuccessful.

Brush admitted to having concerns about the safety of the amateur boxing event, in which the competitors often lack formal training. He said he monitored the news after Young's death as legislators discussed possibly outlawing Toughman.

"I know the Toughman people have implemented some things that are going to hopefully make things safer. We have a contract with them, so we're obligated to follow the terms of that contract."


St. John said the arena is in the third year of a five-year agreement. In addition to provisions for licensed personnel at ringside, he said other provisions have been added to the pact. "But that's strictly between us and them," he said.





Lydia Robertson, the license-holder for Toughman events in Fort Myers, was in town last month to promote the competition and announce some changes from the previous four editions. Most notably, there's safer headgear and a new division for first-time fighters, called "sub-novice."


— *The Associated Press contributed to this report.*

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