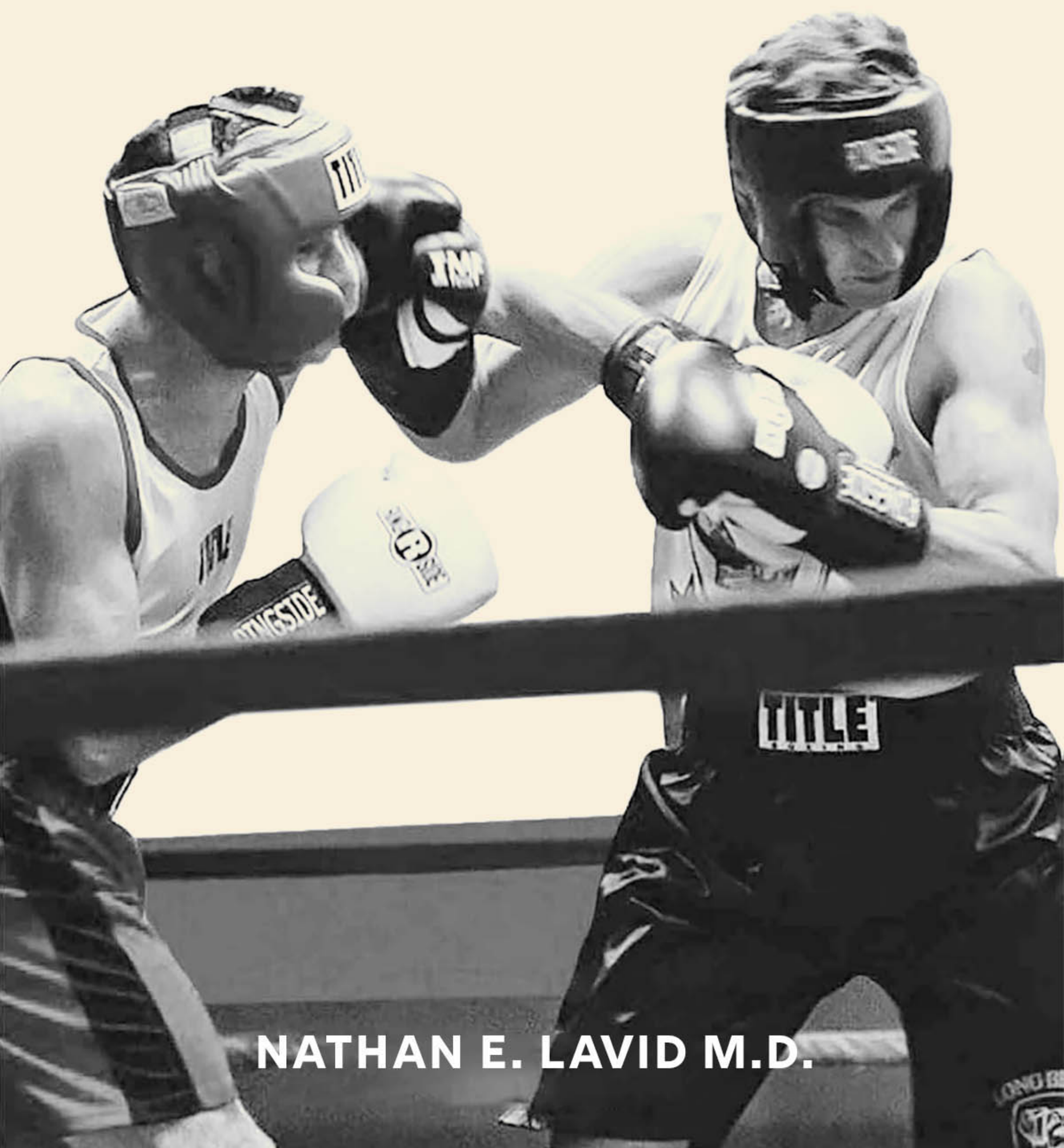


AMATEUR BOXING

MENTAL STRESS & STRENGTH



NATHAN E. LAVID M.D.

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INTRODUCTION

IF YOU HAVE NOT been in a fight, it is coming. You can avoid conflict, take the path of least resistance, and practice nonviolence, but you will still be in a fight one day. You are also going to get punched in the face. This punch will be delivered without warning, and you may not even see it coming. These are the ones that hurt the most. You can scoff, shout me down, and call me a liar. Denial is no escape. Life, inevitability, will bring the fight to you.

This fight may not be physical, but, like all fights, it will be threatening and evoke negative emotions. These emotions are the mental stress of the fight. This mental stress may make the fight harder than it is and may even defeat you before you have begun to fight.

The mental challenges experienced during your fight will be difficult. Nature dictates this, but these challenges are not insurmountable. This negativity can be transformed into positive action and thoughts because you are born with the capacity to fight and meet this challenge. However, how developed this capacity is in all of us varies. Some may have the inherent ability to address

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danger head on. Some may not. Though, no matter how well you can fight, you will get better with practice.

This is why you should box. You box to practice addressing the mental challenges that you will experience outside the ring. The same emotions evoked by boxing are the same emotions that you will experience outside the ring during your fight. This is one of the benefits of boxing, which is an ancient sport. A sport that has persisted because it exercises the whole person, both the body and brain.

The focus of this book is amateur boxing. Boxing as a profession is for a select few, but amateur boxing is for everyone. Now, with the sanctioning of female and older competitors, the only limitation is a medical condition that prevents participation. From a mental standpoint, amateur boxing is useful and provides value with a time-honed methodology and forum to address stress and transform it into strength. This mental strength emerges from mental stress. There is no other pathway. The training in amateur boxing acknowledges this pathway and provides guidance on how this mental stress can be used to your advantage; how it develops positive mental and physical strength.

Amateur boxing transforms this mental stress to strength and this forum is presented from three vantage points. One is from a scientific standpoint. Being a psychiatrist, a large portion of my professional life is addressing mental processes from a scientific perspective. Two, from my experiences as an amateur boxer. Three, from my experiences shadowing and working as a ringside physician before I exclusively practiced psychiatry.

This is an attempt to aid the novice amateur boxer who has not yet entered competition or has just had a few bouts, as well as to encourage the curious reader to take up the sport. For simplicity, I use masculine pronouns, but they are used in the generic sense.

INTRODUCTION

The material within is applicable to us all. There are no distinctions or specifiers needed for culture, race, or gender.

The science presented is influenced by my psychiatric practice. Clinically, the therapeutic usefulness of scientific knowledge varies in each patient. Some patients request and respond to the intellectual enrichment provided by contemporary psychiatric understanding. These patients benefit from reviews of medical literature and the model of the brain I have in my office. Other patients find the substance of scientific knowledge is better appreciated by the findings. Explanation is not requested or needed. Applying this clinical tool is independent of the age and education of my patients. When first caring for a patient, I never know which approach is best. It is only after we have had time together, to size each other up, that the proper therapeutic approach becomes apparent.

Considering how the usefulness of science will vary for each reader, I have simplified much of it and included anatomical and schematic figures to clarify the material. However, the science of the brain and nervous system, termed “neuroscience,” is not a simple topic. While I have simplified much of the neuroscience, I have refrained from oversimplification. Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to the neuroscience of the mental stress you will experience and delve into the evolutionary and biological basis for your emotions. As the brain is a complex organ, this information is technical and dense. For these two chapters, I provide a list of take-home points at the beginning of each chapter. I recommend reading these take-home points, skipping over the text and reviewing the figures. Then continue reading the book.

When first boxing, you will experience strong emotions before and during your bout. These are also the same emotions that you will experience outside the ring. You may question if this mental stress is normal. It is. Revisit chapters 2 and 3 when you are

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wondering a bit more why you feel the way that you do. You will have a better appreciation for the material. Also, for those readers who wish to pursue the science in greater detail, I have provided a bibliography that contains the source material.

I am not an Olympic champion or had any boxing proficiency or potential to consider it as an occupation, but I have been involved with amateur boxing since I was a young boy. I have never regretted any of my time expended on boxing and have gained an enormous amount from the sport. It seems fitting, that as a physician, I was introduced to amateur boxing by my pediatrician. By the time I was six years old, I developed the ability to ignore my parents' directions to the extent they thought I might be becoming deaf. The audiologist thought otherwise. My pediatrician, knowing now my hearing was normal, suggested I might have what then was referred to as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). He offered a trial of stimulant medication, which my mother declined. Enrolling me in sports where I could learn discipline and expend some energy was then brought up. Soon after, I was enrolled in a boxing program at a YMCA in Buffalo, New York.

I have been in and out of amateur boxing ever since. As a youth, I left amateur boxing and pursued other sports. I revisited boxing in college and medical school. Also, during medical school, I would assist ringside physicians at boxing shows.

After medical school, I stopped competing, but worked as a volunteer ringside physician during my internship and residency when I still practiced general medicine. During my subspecialty training in forensic psychiatry, I left amateur boxing again.

I returned to amateur boxing in my forties, when I started taking my two young boys to a boxing gym close to our home in Long Beach, California. Long Beach United Boxing Club has an amateur program. One of the owners and operators of the Club,

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The figures needed for this book were inherently difficult. I needed both informative scientific and humanistic figures, pleasing to the eye for all ages. Thankfully, Jeff Chabot provided the art direction and Jason González generated the illustrations that met these requirements and my gratitude.

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This book would not have materialized if not for my firsthand experience as an amateur boxer. I owe many thanks to the many coaches, officials, fellow boxers, family, and friends who have guided and supported me through my journeys in the ring. And I would probably not have taken these journeys if not first brought to the boxing gym by my mother. Mom, I could always hear you. This book belongs to you. A"H.

To Benjamin and Samuel

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