[GB] The High Court issues blocking injunction for boxing matches

IRIS 2018-10:1/14

Alexandros K. Antoniou
University of Essex

On 20 September 2018, the High Court granted an order aimed at tackling illicit streams of professional boxing matches. The application was made by Matchroom Boxing Ltd against the UK's main retail Internet service providers, including Sky UK Ltd, British Telecommunications Plc, Virgin Media Ltd and others. The company stages more than 20 boxing events yearly, several of which feature the British boxer Anthony Joshua who currently holds three of the four major world championships in the sport. In the UK, the boxing matches are broadcast by Sky under exclusive agreements with Matchroom. Matchroom owns the copyrights in broadcasts in the case of events featuring Mr. Joshua and Sky owns the copyrights in the case of other events, but assigned the right to bring these proceedings to Matchroom. Sky broadcasts boxing matches on either a standard or pay-per-view (PPV) basis. PPV events are of most interest to boxing fans and can attract millions of viewers. Sky shares the revenue accrued from the PPV events with Matchroom and pays a substantial fee for the broadcasting rights too. It is for this reason that Sky supported the application. The remaining defendants did not oppose it either.

In this case, an order was sought in respect of streaming servers to tackle the 'growing problem' of live boxing matches being delivered in violation of Matchroom's and Sky's rights. Mr Justice Arnold emphasised the evidence of 'very large numbers of infringing streams having been watched for Mr Joshua's most recent fights,' causing Matchroom and Sky a significant loss of revenue. In July 2018, similar orders were made in favour of the Football Association Premier League Ltd (FAPL) and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), requiring the defendants to block their customers' access to streaming servers which deliver infringing live streams of Premier League and UEFA matches footage to UK consumers.

However, the blocking injunction in the present case differed from those granted in the cases of the FAPL and UEFA in two aspects. Firstly, target servers cannot be easily identified in the same way, because of the irregular timing of the boxing matches. Hence, Arnold J. granted the order for a seven-day monitoring period prior to each event. The details of the particular form of monitoring were kept confidential to prevent circumvention. Secondly, whereas the FAPL and UEFA orders covered a season, or part of it, this was not possible in the present case,

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

considering that boxing events are not fixed well in advance; thus, the order was made for two years but required Matchroom to notify the defendants 'at least four weeks in advance' of the scheduling of a match.

Having considered the evidence and the terms of the order, Arnold J. took the view that such an order did not impair the defendants' rights to carry on business. He concluded that the interference with the Internet users' rights to receive information was justified by the legitimate aim of preventing the infringement of Matchroom's and Sky's rights on a large scale and was proportionate to that aim: 'it [was] effective and dissuasive; no equally effective but less onerous measures [were] available to Matchroom, it [avoided] creating barriers to legitimate trade, it [was] not unduly complicated or costly and [contained] safeguards against misuse.' Finally, it was agreed that there should be no order in relation to costs.

Matchroom Boxing Ltd & Anor v BT Plc & Ors [2018] EWHC 2443 (Ch) (20 September 2018)

https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Ch/2018/2443.html

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026

© European Audiovisual Observatory (Council of Europe) 2026