

**Mixed Martial Arts Unified Rules  
and other important regulations  
including  
2012 Revisions to MMA Judging Criteria**

**1) DEFINITIONS:**

“Mixed Martial Arts” means unarmed combat involving the use, subject to any applicable limitations set forth in these Unified Rules and other regulations of the applicable Commission, of a combination of techniques from different disciplines of the martial arts, including, without limitation, grappling, submission holds, kicking and striking.

“Unarmed Combat” means any form of competition in which a blow is usually struck which may reasonably be expected to inflict injury.

“Unarmed Combatant” means any person who engages in unarmed combat.

“Commission” means the applicable athletic commission or regulatory body overseeing the bouts, exhibitions or competitions of mixed martial arts.

**2) WEIGHT DIVISIONS:**

Except with the approval of the Commission, or its executive director, the classes for mixed martial arts contests or exhibitions and the weights for each class shall be:

Flyweight 125 pounds and under

Bantamweight over 125 to 135 pounds

Featherweight over 135 to 145 pounds

Lightweight over 145 to 155 pounds

Welterweight over 155 to 170 pounds

Middleweight over 170 to 185 pounds

Light Heavyweight over 185 to 205 pounds

Heavyweight over 205 to 265 pounds

Super Heavyweight over 265 pounds

In non-championship fights, there shall be allowed a 1 pound weigh allowance. In championship fights, the participants must weigh no more than that permitted for the relevant weight division.

The Commission may also approve catch weight bouts, subject to their review and discretion. For example, the Commission may still decide to allow the contest the maximum weight allowed is 177 pounds if it feels that the contest would still be fair, safe and competitive.

In addition, if one athlete weighs 264 pounds while the opponent weighs 267 pounds, the Commission may still decide to allow the contest if it determines that the contest would still be fair, safe and competitive in spite of the fact that the two contestants technically weighed in differing weight classes.

**3) RING/FIGHTING AREA REQUIREMENTS AND EQUIPMENT:**

A) Mixed martial arts contests and exhibitions may be held in a ring or in a fenced area.

B) A ring used for a contest or exhibition of mixed martial arts must meet the following requirements:

- (i) The ring must be no smaller than 20 feet square and no larger than 32 feet square within the ropes. One corner shall have a blue designation and the corner directly opposite must have a red designation.
- (ii) The ring floor must extend at least 18 inches beyond the ropes. The ring floor must be padded with ensolite or similar closed-cell foam, with at least a 1-inch layer of foam padding. Padding must extend beyond the ring ropes and over the edge of the platform, with a top covering of canvas, duck or similar material tightly stretched and laced to the ring platform. Material that tends to gather in lumps or ridges must not be used.
- (iii) The ring platform must not be more than 4 feet above the floor of the building and must have suitable steps for the use of the unarmed combatants.
- (iv) Ring posts must be made of metal, not more than 3 inches in diameter, extending from the floor of the building to a minimum height of 58 inches above the ring floor, and must be properly padded in a manner approved by the Commission. Ring posts must be at least 18 inches away from the ring ropes.
- (v) There must be five ring ropes, not less than 1 inch in diameter and wrapped in soft material. The lowest ring rope must be 12 inches above the ring floor.
- (vi) There must not be any obstruction or object, including, without limitation, a triangular border, on any part of the ring floor.

C) A fenced area used in a contest or exhibition of mixed martial arts must meet the following requirements:

- (i) The fenced area must be circular or have at least six equal sides and must be no smaller than 20 feet wide and no larger than 32 feet wide.
- (ii) The floor of the fenced area must be padded with ensolite or another similar closed-cell foam, with at least a 1-inch layer of foam padding, with a top covering of canvas, duck or similar material tightly stretched and laced to the platform of the fenced area. Material that tends to gather in lumps or ridges must not be used.
- (iii) The platform of the fenced area must not be more than 4 feet above the floor of the building and must have suitable steps for the use of the unarmed combatants.
- (iv) Fence posts must be made of metal, not more than 6 inches in diameter, extending from the floor of the building to a minimum height of 58 inches above the floor of the fenced area, and must be properly padded in a manner approved by the Commission.
- (v) The fencing used to enclose the fenced area must be made of a material that will prevent an unarmed combatant from falling out of the fenced area or breaking through the fenced area onto the floor of the building or onto the spectators, including, without limitation, chain link fence coated with vinyl.
- (vi) Any metal portion of the fenced area must be covered and padded in a manner approved by the Commission and must not be abrasive to the unarmed combatants.
- (vii) The fenced area must have two entrances.
- (viii) There must not be any obstruction on any part of the fence surrounding the area in which the unarmed combatants are to be competing.

#### 4) STOOLS:

- A) A stool of a type approved by the Commission shall be available for each contestant.
- B) An appropriate number of stools or chairs, of a type approved by the Commission, shall be available for each contestant's seconds. Such stools or chairs shall be located near each contestant's corner for use outside of the fighting area.
- C) All stools and chairs used must be thoroughly cleaned or replaced after the conclusion of each bout.

**5) EQUIPMENT:**

For each bout, the promoter shall provide a clean water bucket, a clean plastic water bottle, and any other supplies as directed by the Commission, in each corner.

**6) SPECIFICATIONS FOR HANDWRAPPING:**

A) In all weight classes, the bandages on each contestant's hand shall be restricted to soft gauze cloth of not more than 15 yards in length and two inches in width, held in place by not more than 10 feet of surgeon's tape, one inch in width, for each hand.

B) Surgeon's adhesive tape shall be placed directly on each hand for protection near the wrist. The tape may cross the back of the hand twice and extend to cover and protect the knuckles when the hand is clenched to make a fist.

C) The bandages shall be evenly distributed across the hand.

D) Bandages and tape shall be placed on the contestant's hands in the dressing room in the presence of the Commission and in the presence of the manager or chief second of his or her opponent.

E) Under no circumstances are gloves to be placed on the hands of a contestant until the approval of the Commission is received.

**7) MOUTHPIECES:**

A) All contestants are required to wear a mouthpiece during competition. The mouthpiece shall be subject to examination and approval by the attending physician.

B) The round cannot begin without the mouthpiece in place.

C) If the mouthpiece is involuntarily dislodged during competition, the referee shall call time, clean the mouthpiece, and reinsert the mouthpiece at the first opportune moment without interfering with the immediate action.

**8) PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT:**

A) Male mixed martial artists shall wear a groin protector of their own selection, of a type approved by the Commissioner.

B) Female mixed martial artists are prohibited from wearing groin protectors.

C) Female mixed martial artists shall wear a chest protector during competition. The chest protector shall be subject to approval of the Commissioner.

**9) GLOVES:**

A) All contestants shall wear glove which are at least 4 ounces and are approved by the Commission. Generally, gloves should not weigh more than 6 ounces without the approval of the Commission. Certain larger sized gloves, e.g. 2 XL – 4 XL, may be allowed even though they may slightly exceed 6 ounces.

B) Gloves should be supplied by the promoter and approved by the Commission. No contestant shall supply their own gloves for participation.

**10) APPAREL:**

A) Each contestant shall wear mixed martial arts shorts (board shorts), biking shorts (vale tudo shorts), kick-boxing shorts or other shorts approved by the Commission.

B) Gi's or shirts are prohibited during competition except that female contestant's must wear shirts approved by the Commission.

C) Shoes and any type of padding on the feet are prohibited during competition.

**11) APPEARANCE:**

A) Each unarmed combatant must be clean and present a tidy appearance.

B) The excessive use of grease or any other foreign substance may not be used on the face or body of an unarmed combatant. The referees or the Commission shall cause any excessive grease or foreign substance to be removed.

C) The Commission shall determine whether head or facial hair presents any hazard to the safety of the unarmed combatant or his opponent or will interfere with the supervision and conduct of the contest or exhibition. If the head or facial hair of an unarmed combatant presents such a hazard or will interfere with the supervision and conduct of the contest or exhibition, the unarmed combatant may not compete in the contest or exhibition unless the circumstances creating the hazard or potential interference are corrected to the satisfaction of the Commission.

D) An unarmed combatant may not wear any jewelry or other piercing accessories while competing in the contest or exhibition.

**12) ROUND LENGTH:**

A) Each non-championship mixed martial arts contest is to be for 3 rounds, each round no more than 5 minutes duration, with a rest period of 1 minute between each round.

B) Each championship mixed martial arts contest is to be for 5 rounds, each round no more than 5 minutes duration, with a rest period of 1 minute between each round.

**13) STOPPING CONTEST:**

A) The referee is the sole arbiter of a contest and is the only individual authorized to stop a contest. The referee may take advice from the ringside physician and/or the Commission with respect to the decision to stop a contest.

B) The referee and the ringside physician are the only individuals authorized to enter the ring/fighting area at any time during competition other than the rest periods and subsequent to the contest ending.

**14) JUDGING:**

A) All bouts will be evaluated and scored by 3 judges who shall evaluate the contest from different location around the ring/fighting area. The referee may not be one of the 3 judges.

B) The 10-Point Must System will be the standard system of scoring a bout. Under the 10-Point Must Scoring System, 10 points must be awarded to the winner of the round and 9 points or less must be awarded to the loser, except for a rare even round, which is scored (10-10).

C) Judges shall evaluate mixed martial arts techniques, such as effective striking, effective grappling, effective aggressiveness and Cage/ring control. Scoring evaluations shall be made giving equal weight to effective striking and effective grappling. It will be determined on a sliding scale. If a round is affected more by striking, then striking will be weighed more heavily. If a round is affected more by grappling than grappling will be weighed more heavily. Cage/Ring Control are secondary criteria to be used when effective striking and effective grappling are even. Effective aggression will be weighed more heavily than cage/ring control. "Effective striking" is judged by determining the impact of legal strikes landed by a contestant and the number of such legal strikes. Heavier strikes that have a visible impact on the opponent will be given more weight than the number of strikes landed. These assessments include causing an opponent to appear stunned from a legal blow, causing the opponent to stagger, appearance of a cut or bruise from a legal strike and causing the opponent to show pain. Cumulative impact on a fighter will also be weighed. If neither fighter shows an advantage in impact of strikes, the number of strikes will determine the most effective striker.

“Effective grappling” is judged by considering the amount of successful executions of a legal takedown, reversals and submission attempts. Examples of factors to consider are take downs from standing position to mount position, passing the guard to a dominant position, and bottom position fighters using an active, threatening guard to create submission attempts. Submission attempts which come close to ending a fight will be weighted more highly than attempts which are easily defended. Submission attempts which cause an opponent to weaken or tire from the effort required to defend the technique will also be weighted highly in scoring. High amplitude takedowns and throws which have great impact will be scored more heavily than a takedown which does not have great impact.

“Effective aggression” is moving forward scoring with a legal technique or attacking from the guard with threatening submissions.

“Cage/Ring Control” is dictating the pace, place and position of the fight

1. A round is to be scored as a 10-10 Round when both contestants appear to be fighting evenly and neither contestant shows superiority by even a close margin. This score should rarely be used.
2. A round is to be scored as a 10-9 Round when a contestant wins by a close margin, landing the greater number of effective legal strikes, demonstrating effective grappling, and utilizing other effective legal techniques.
3. A round is to be scored as a 10-8 Round when a contestant wins by a large margin, by effective striking and or effective grappling that have great impact on the opponent.
4. A round is to be scored as a 10-7 Round when a contestant totally dominates by effective striking and or effective grappling, which put the opponent in great danger throughout the round. In a 10-7 round referee stoppage may be eminent. This score should rarely be used.

#### 15) **FOULS:**

A) The following acts constitute fouls in a contest or exhibition of mixed martial arts and may result in penalties, at the discretion of the referee, if committed:

- 1) Butting with the head
- 2) Eye gouging of any kind
- 3) Biting
- 4) Spitting at an opponent
  
- 5) Hair pulling
- 6) Fish hooking
- 7) Groin attacks of any kind
- 8) Putting a finger into any orifice or any cut or laceration of an opponent
- 9) Small joint manipulation
  
- 10) Striking downward using the point of the elbow
- 11) Striking to the spine or the back of the head
- 12) Kicking to the kidney with a heel
- 13) Throat strikes of any kind, including, without limitation, grabbing the trachea
- 14) Clawing, pinching or twisting the flesh
- 15) Grabbing the clavicle

- 16) Kicking the head of a grounded opponent
- 17) Kneeing the head of a grounded opponent
- 18) Stomping a grounded opponent
- 19) Holding the fence
- 20) Holding the shorts or gloves of an opponent
  
- 21) Using abusive language in fenced ring/fighting area
- 22) Engaging in any unsportsmanlike conduct that causes injury to an opponent
- 23) Attacking an opponent on or during the break
- 24) Attacking an opponent who is under the care of the referee
- 25) Attacking an opponent after the bell has sounded the end of the round
  
- 26) Timidity, including, without limitation, avoiding contact with an opponent, intentionally or consistently dropping the mouthpiece or faking an injury
- 27) Throwing opponent out of ring/fighting area
- 28) Flagrantly disregarding the instructions of the referee
- 29) Spiking an opponent to the canvas on his head or neck
- 30) Interference by the corner
- 31) Applying any foreign substance to the hair or body to gain an advantage

B) Disqualification may occur after any combination of fouls or after a flagrant foul at the discretion of the referee.

C) Fouls may result in a point being deducted by the official scorekeeper from the offending contestant's score. The scorekeeper, not the judges, will be responsible for calculating the true score after factoring in the point deduction.

D) Only a referee can assess a foul. If the referee does not call the foul, judges must not make that assessment on their own and should not factor such into their scoring calculations.

E) If a foul is committed:

- i) The referee shall call timeout.
- ii) The referee shall order the offending contestant to a neutral location.
- iii) The referee shall check the fouled contestant's condition and safety.
- iv) The referee shall then assess the foul to the offending contestant and deduct points if the referee deems it appropriate, and notify the commission, the corners, the official scorekeeper of his decision on whether the foul was accidental or intentional and whether a point is to be taken away.

F) If a bottom contestant commits a foul, unless the top contestant is injured, the contest will continue and:

- i) The referee will verbally notify the bottom contestant of the foul.
- ii) When the round is over, the referee will assess the foul and notify the commission, the corners, the judges and the official scorekeeper.
- iii) The referee may terminate a contest based on the severity of a foul. For such a flagrant foul, the contestant committing the foul shall lose by disqualification.

G) Low Blow Foul:

- i) A fighter who has been struck with a low blow is allowed up to 5 minutes to recover from the foul as long as in the ringside doctor's opinion the fighter may possibly continue on in the contest.
- ii) If the fighter states that they can continue on before the five minutes of time have expired, the referee shall, as soon as practical, restart the fight.

iii) If the fighter goes over the 5 minute time allotment, and the fight cannot be restarted, the contest must come to an end with the outcome determined by the round and time in which the fight was stopped. See Section 16 below.

H) Fighter Fouled by other than low blow:

i) If a contest of mixed martial arts is stopped because of an accidental foul, the referee shall determine whether the unarmed combatant who has been fouled can continue or not. If the unarmed combatant's chance of winning has not been seriously jeopardized as a result of the foul and if the foul did not involve a concussive impact to the head of the unarmed combatant who has been fouled, the referee may order the contest or exhibition continued after a recuperative interval of not more than 5 minutes. Immediately after separating the unarmed combatants, the referee shall inform the Commission's representative of his determination that the foul was accidental.

ii) If a fighter is fouled by blow that the referee deems illegal, the referee should stop the action and call for time. The referee may take the injured fighter to the ringside doctor and have the ringside doctor examine the fighter as to their ability to continue on in the contest. The ringside doctor has up to 5 minutes to make their determination. If the ringside doctor determines that the fighter can continue in the contest, the referee shall as soon as practical restart the fight. Unlike the low blow foul rule, the fighter does not have up to 5 minutes of time to use, at their discretion, and must continue the fight when instructed to by the referee.

iii) For a foul other than a low blow, if the injured fighter is deemed not fit to continue, by the referee, the referee must immediately call a halt to the bout. If the fighter is deemed not fit to continue, by the referee, even though some of the 5 minute foul time is still remaining, the fighter cannot avail himself of the remaining time and the fight must be stopped.

iv) If the referee stops the contest and employs the use of the ringside doctor, the ringside physician's examinations shall not exceed 5 minutes. If 5 minutes is exceeded, the fight cannot be re-started and the contest must end.

**16) INJURIES SUSTAINED BY FAIR BLOWS AND FOULS:**

A) If an injury sustained during competition as a result of a legal maneuver is severe enough to terminate a bout, the injured contestant loses by technical knockout.

B) If an injury sustained during competition as a result of an intentional foul, as determined by the referee, is severe enough to terminate a bout, the contestant causing the injury loses by disqualification.

C) If an injury is sustained during competition as a result of an intentional foul, as determined by the referee, and the bout is allowed to continue, the referee shall notify the scorekeeper to automatically deduct two points from the contestant who committed the foul.

D) If an injury sustained during competition as a result of an intentional foul, as determined by the referee, causes the injured contestant to be unable to continue at a subsequent point in the contest, the injured contestant shall win by technical decision, if he or she is ahead on the score cards. If the injured contestant is even or behind on the score cards at the time of stoppage, the outcome of the bout shall be declared a technical draw.

E) If a contestant injures himself or herself while attempting to foul his or her opponent, the referee shall not take any action in his or her favor, and the injury shall be treated in the same manner as an injury produced by a fair blow.

F) If an injury sustained during competition as a result of an accidental foul, as determined by the referee, is severe enough for the referee to stop the bout immediately, the bout shall result in a no contest if stopped before two rounds have been completed in a three round bout or if stopped before three rounds have been completed in a five round bout.

G) If an injury sustained during competition as a result of an accidental foul, as determined by the referee, is severe enough for the referee to stop the bout immediately, the bout shall result in a technical decision awarded to the contestant who is ahead on the score cards at the time the bout is stopped only when the bout is stopped after two rounds of a three round bout, or three rounds of a five round bout have been completed.

H) Incomplete rounds should be scored utilizing the same criteria as the scoring of other rounds up to the point said incomplete round is stopped.

#### 17) TYPES OF CONTEST RESULTS:

A) Submission by:

- i) Physical Tap Out
- ii) Verbal tap out

B) Knockout:

- i) when Referee stops the contest (TKO)
- ii) when an injury as a result of a legal maneuver is severe enough to terminate a bout (TKO)
- iii) when a contestant is rendered unconscious due to strikes or kicks (KO)

C) Decision via the scorecards:

- i) Unanimous Decision - All three judges score the contest for the same contestant
- ii) Split Decision - Two judges score the contest for one contestant and one judge scores for the opponent
- iii) Majority Decision - Two judges score the contest for the same contestant and one judge scores a draw

iv) Draws:

- a) Unanimous Draw - When all three judges score the contest a draw
- b) Majority Draw - When two judges score the contest a draw
- c) Split Draw - When all three judges score differently

D) Disqualification

E) Forfeit

F) Technical Draw

G) Technical Decision

H) No Decision