

## ADVANCING THE SPORT OF MMA THROUGH REFINING THE SCORING SYSTEM

We'd like to express our whole-hearted support for the ABC's revisiting of the "Unified Rules." Clearly, through time and experience, America's commission officials have gained greater insight into the complexities of regulating Mixed Martial Arts. As the sport evolves, we as officials need to make every effort to match this evolutionary process by rethinking and refining our regulations and procedures. It is in this spirit that we offer recommendations for revising the current scoring system.

It has become fairly obvious to those following the sport that there is growing discontent with the way many matches – particularly closely contested matches – are scored. In reality, this seed of discontent is rooted not in the lack of expertise or diligence of our officials, but rather in the use of a scoring system that does not provide them with the tools necessary to guarantee that their final scores accurately reflect the true nature of the bout that occurred.

### **A Brief History of MMA Scoring**

Prior to the implementation of a scoring system, the outcome of MMA competition could only be decided by knockout or submission. This was true when the predecessor of MMA was an Olympic sport known as Pankration in 648 B.C. as well as when it transformed into Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu competition and Vale Tudo (literally, "Anything Goes"). There were no judges. If an imposed time limit expired, the bout would be called a draw.

### **The Present Scoring System**

The Ten-Point-Must System allows each judge to reward his or her selection of the more effective MMA fighter with a score of 10-9. In the rare instance when one fighter's relative effectiveness is considered "damaging and overwhelmingly dominant," judges may reward him with a score of 10-8. Conversely, when there is no way to even marginally distinguish between either fighter's effectiveness, the very rare "10-10" score may be used.

Our premise is that the Ten-Point-Must System, as used by the sport for which it was created, boxing, has proven inadequate for use in a multi-discipline sport like MMA, *particularly when scoring very close rounds*. The nature, variety and diversity of what regularly occur in most MMA rounds demands a scoring system with a finer gradient of options to ensure more fair and accurate scoring.

The obvious failing of the current system is that it forces our judges to reward fighters equally for clearly unequal efforts, actions and results. Any round that falls between the vastly divergent circumstances of “marginal advantage in cage control” to anything short of “overwhelming dominance” are rewarded with the exact same score: 10-9. This results in a total-bout scoring that does not accurately reflect the action, leads to criticism of the officials, and even incurs accusations of corruption.

### **Ten-Point-Must System with the Use of Half-Points**

Using half-points allows judges to score bouts in a way that accurately reflects the *qualitative difference* between the combatants. By using this finer gradient of judging, officials may take into consideration both the “scoring criteria” and the “margin by which” each round is won. For instance, a fighter who wins a round marginally based on “cage control” would not receive the same credit as a fighter who wins a round based on the “greater damage inflicted.” The overall scoring of a bout should not be just a reflection of who won the most rounds, but also a reflection of the “*nature of how*” and the “*margin by which*” each round was won. This is particularly true for MMA, considering that the majority of bouts are scheduled for only three rounds.

What follows is an abbreviated description of what justifies each score. This can easily be expanded and supported with video in order to help objectify and insure its’ consistent application.

#### **10-10: EVEN ROUND**

Although seldom warranted because very close rounds may be scored 10-9.5, its usage is preferable to arbitrarily choosing a winner. Generally, an even round reflects one of three scenarios.

- A round in which neither fighter distinguished himself via any of the established criteria.
- A round in which one fighter is more effective for half of the round and then his opponent comes back and exhibits equal effectiveness in the second half of the round.
- A round in which both fighters take turns equally inflicting damage on each other, scoring equally with clean strikes, effective grappling and or equal cage control.

#### **10-9.5: MARGINAL ADVANTAGE**

*This score reflects a round that is extremely close.* Neither fighter inflicts greater damage on the other. One fighter may have marginally scored a greater number of strikes, or takedowns, marginally controlled the grappling, or demonstrated superior cage control.

#### **10-9: CLEAR ADVANTAGE**

This score reflects a round in which it was fairly obvious who won, either through the comparative extent of damage inflicted, the number or quality of clean strikes, or the demonstration of superior grappling. **10-9 is the most frequently used score.**

### **10-8.5: DOMINANT ADVANTAGE**

This score reflects a round in which the winner is quite obvious, exhibiting *dominance* throughout the entire round, **OR**, inflicting significant damage to his opponent.

### **10-8: OVERWHELMING ADVANTAGE**

This score reflects a round in which one fighter clearly wins the round through a combination of *damage and domination* throughout the entire round resulting from the obvious effects of superiority in striking and/or grappling.

Although scores of 10-7.5 and 10-7 are theoretically possible, they are improbable. A fight so one-sided would ordinarily dictate a referee's stoppage by TKO.

**Half-point scoring is not a new concept. It has been used successfully around the world and is almost universally preferred by the professional officials who have had experience with it.**

### **Scoring Criteria Revisited**

Having addressed the use of a numerical system that will allow our judges to provide scores that better reflect the action, and more appropriately reward the fighters, it is time to re-evaluate the nature of the prioritized criteria that we use as a context for our evaluation.

Although MMA competition is a sport, at its core it is also a fight. And, generally speaking, the most obvious and objective indication as to which fighter is winning is the *extent of damage inflicted*. Because the concept of "damage" as defined below is a "result" of effectiveness rather than an "action", it should be valued highest on the prioritized judge's scoring criteria.

## **PRIORTIZED SCORING CRITERIA**

### **1. Damage**

Damage may be defined as any visible sign of debilitation

- A cut or a bruise
- Appearing stunned from a blow to the head or body slam
- Wincing from a body blow
- Ceasing forward movement, becoming defensive or hastily retreating after being struck
- Staggering or favoring a leg that has been kicked.
- Debilitation resulting from the efforts required to escape wrestling holds or submission attempts.

## 2. Effective Striking \* / Effective Grappling \*\*

Effective Striking and Effective Grappling should appear parallel as second on the list of prioritized criterion. They should be considered the “*fall-back positions*” for evaluating effectiveness when neither fighter distinguishes himself or herself in regard to damage inflicted. Placing “*effective striking*” above “*effective grappling*,” as exists in the current criteria, is unnecessary since *the best measure of effective striking is “damage”*. Keeping them parallel at number-two allows judges to evaluate equally the impact that either action(s) had with due consideration for how much of the round was contested on the mat versus via ‘stand-up’.

## 3. Cage Control

When neither fighter distinguishes himself through the amount of damage inflicted (1), or the volume or quality of successful striking / grappling (2), Cage (or ring) Control should be the point of evaluation for determining the judges score.

Cage Control may be defined as dictating the pace, location and position of the contest through any of the following:

- Forcing the action through aggressiveness \*\*\*
- Countering attempted takedowns to remain standing
- Taking an opponent down to force a ground fight
- Creating threatening submission attempts
- Creating striking opportunities while on the ground
- Using footwork and timing to dictate the stand up action

By reformatting the criteria in this way, we better prioritize the overlapping concepts that are essential to the evaluation of each fighter’s relative effectiveness. We clarify the criteria by establishing the most logical conceptual priority.

1. RESULTS - damage
2. ACTIONS – striking / grappling
3. EFFORTS – cage control

Cage Control leads to Successful Striking / Grappling which leads to Damage

EFFORT leads to..... ACTION, which leads to.....RESULTS

### Notes

- \* **Successful Striking:** Considers the total number and quality of legal strikes landed.
- \*\* **Effective Grappling:**
  - a. The successful execution of a legal takedown.
  - b. Successfully executing a reversal/sweep.

- c. Passing the guard to side control or mount position.
- d. Bottom fighter demonstrates an active threatening guard.
- e. Applying a near-submission.

### **Near-Submissions:**

When a submission is serious and threatening with the potential to end the contest but is ultimately unsuccessful, it is a *near-submission*. *A near-submission is to grappling what a knockdown is to effective striking, and should carry the same weight in scoring.* However, in the present judging system it frequently goes unrecognized. This is unacceptable, and can be rectified by having the referee make the determination that a near-submission has occurred and then signaling this to the judges by raising one arm straight overhead and holding it until the fighter taps-out or until the submission is terminated.

Supporting criteria for the referee's decision that a near-submission exists is available for discussion upon consideration of this proposal.

\*\*\* **Aggressiveness:** Forcing the action through aggressiveness is listed here under Cage Control rather than the separate and superior criteria point in what has been the commonly accepted paradigm (i.e. Effective Aggressiveness). The rationale for doing this is that if the aggressiveness is indeed "effective" then by definition it will be evaluated and credited under the superior criteria points of Successful Striking/Grappling and/or Damage. Aggressiveness demonstrates effort. When it yields successful action it is held in higher regard. And when that action results in damage, the aggressiveness is valued at its highest level.

### **Resolving Draws**

Generally speaking, when a fight is declared a draw no one is pleased. This is particularly true when it occurs in a championship contest. With this in mind, let's explore the criteria and procedure for resolving draws.

In addition to three judges scoring each bout, there is a designated fourth judge, the **Table Judge**. The sole responsibility of this judge is to record the following techniques and scores.

#### ***To gain points for position, the competitor must show clear control for three seconds***

- Flash Knockdowns = 2 points
- Takedown or Throw into opponents guard = 2 points
- Sweep from bottom position = 2 points
- Passing opponent's guard = 3 points
- Takedown or Throw into side control = 3 points
- Application of a Body Triangle = 4 points
- Gaining Full Mount position = 4 points
- Gaining Back Mount position with Hooks in = 4 points
- Gaining Back Mount knees on ground, opponent flat on stomach = 4 points

The score total recorded by the **Table Judge** will be used only to resolve those bouts declared a draw after regulation time has expired. The fighter scoring the most points will be

declared the winner by *Technical Superiority*. In the event that neither fighter scores a point, or, if the score is tied, the bout will be declared a **Draw**.

Once again, we want to offer our congratulations and highest praise for the ABC's willingness to revisit the Unified Rules in an effort to continue their outstanding contribution to the evolution of MMA. We hope that you see the merit in this proposal and are available for discussion in regard to its application.

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