

The Doc Is In :

Big Egos & Bad Decisions

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It has often been said that, where you are in life is the result of the decisions you make. This is particularly true in the combat sports. The decisions are many and varied: why you've decided to train; where you've decided to train; the discipline in which you've decided to train; which instructor you've decided to train with; and last but not least, how seriously will you train?

Assuming that you make all the right decisions and that you've trained with spirit and purpose, at some point you may decide to test your skills in open competition. As a novice fighter, your competition will usually be novices from other gyms, at what are known as "smokers". At this level of competition, it is extremely important that your trainer/instructor is more concerned with your health and safety than in just winning. Where you start and whom you are matched against will in large measure determine the degrees of success you achieve.

Astute fight managers have known for years that talented young fighters should be brought along slowly, and matched against opponents that are beatable. As a fighter's skill level and confidence improves, he is gradually matched against better-quality opponents.

Young fighters, including boxers, kickboxers, and mixed martial arts (MMA) competitors, should be matched against the best possible competition available. However, every effort should be made to avoid mismatches. Losses chip away at self-confidence. Losses, which also include a physical beating, frequently shatter a fighter's self-confidence. Unfortunately, all too often, I have seen the promising career of a talented young fighter derailed because of a mismatch.

Why do mismatches occur? Usually it's the result of a poor decision on the part of the fighter, his manager, or the promoter/matchmaker. An unfortunate fact of life in the fightsport business is that there are more

fighters than there are promotions to showcase their talents. Consequently, it's possible that a promoter or matchmaker wasn't given the true record for a fighter. The number of wins could be inflated, the losses minimized, or both. Either way, if the fighter or his manager makes the decision to lie to the promoter, the consequence of that lie may be a mismatch and the end of a promising career.

Another factor contributing to a mismatch is overconfidence resulting from a fighter's inflated ego. It's one thing to believe in your own abilities; it's quite another to discount the ability of your opponent. Whenever a fighter decides to fight in a discipline with rules different than those he is familiar with, he is usually making a bad decision.

As my good friend, "Judo" Gene LeBell states in his just published autobiography, *The Godfather of Grappling*, "You don't go into another man's backyard, play by his rules and expect to win."

I have seen very good boxers beaten down by muay Thai fighters because they couldn't defend leg kicks. I have seen muay Thai fighters hurt because they couldn't defend takedowns and submissions by MMA fighters. I have seen full-contact fighters kick the snot out of both muay Thai and MMA fighters because the rules did not allow sweeps, takedowns, or kicks to the legs.

The bottom line is this: if you don't want a losing record and needless injuries, surround yourself with good people who share your vision and concern for your well-being. Don't take fights when the rules favor your opponent's style. Last but not least, keep your ego in check and be realistic about your abilities. There is no shame in losing to a superior opponent; the shame is not giving yourself every opportunity to win.