

## *The Doc Is In :*

### **The K-1 Experience**

**by Nelson "DOC" Hamilton**

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I know that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and a case can be made for summer television programming that includes every type of motor racing known to mankind, as well as volleyball, cycling and water polo. However, I will never understand why the entertainment value of kickboxing and mixed martial arts takes a backseat to the likes of fly-fishing, synchronized swimming, spelling bees, bass fishing, and double-dutch rope skipping. Oh, and don't forget hot dog eating contests. *Give me a break!*

But if you've been watching ESPN2 with any regularity, you've been treated to almost daily broadcasts of previously recorded K-1 competitions. Although I don't know why ESPN2 decided to air the past two years of action, I'm very pleased for two reasons.

First, it's about time that kickboxing and its participants finally get the general public exposure they deserve. Although practically unknown in America, the fighters are world-class athletes. The sport, without question, is universally considered by millions to be one of the most exciting and entertaining.

Secondly, because of the oft-repeated broadcasts, numerous people have expressed an interest in learning more about K-1 events. With this in mind, here is my perspective as a referee working the event.

Since the K-1 Las Vegas is held on a Friday, I fly in the day before. This gives me the opportunity to attend the press conference, weigh-in, and rules meeting.

The press conference begins with each contestant being introduced. After the introductions, each is asked what he thinks of his opponent. Predictably, each participant states that his opponent is a good fighter and a worthy opponent. However, he is quick to add that his opponent is definitely in over his head and he will be lucky if he survives the fight without sustaining bodily damage so extensive that his parents won't recognize him.

The weigh-in then begins. Typically, this is the time most looked forward to by the exhibitionists and voyeurs. Most fighters can't wait to peel down to their mini-briefs, even though they may be five-to-ten pounds underweight. It also appears that almost everyone in attendance, particularly the women, have a camera in hand.

Immediately following the weigh-in is the rules meeting for fighters and their handlers. Since K-1 is an international event, many of the participants are non-English speaking. Every rule must be explained fully and demonstrated if necessary. Every participant is encouraged to ask questions. Once in the ring, claiming ignorance of a rule is unacceptable.

The day of the fight, all referees and judges must attend the officials meeting, which begins around two hours before the first bout. The meeting reviews in detail all the rules and regulations that will be used in the K-1 tournament. However, along with the actual tournament are anywhere from three-to-five "Super Fights", which often carry a different set of rules. These fights can be full contact, modified muay Thai, san shou, or international rules. Since it is not uncommon for a referee to be assigned three bouts governed by three different sets of rules, it is essential that all rules are reviewed in detail.

Once the rules have been covered, videos demonstrating the criteria for judging are viewed. All fights are scored according to the ten-point must system, meaning the winner of the round must receive ten points. However, the scoring also includes half-points. A very close round could be scored 10-9.5; an obvious winner would be 10-9; a more dominant round could be 10-8.5; and a knockdown scored 10-8.

The meeting concludes at 4:45 p.m. All officials then report to ringside where the Nevada State Athletic Commission gives each judge and referee their assignments for the evening's program.

Each judge fills out the scorecards of the bouts they are assigned. Time permitting, each official tries to visit the dressing rooms of the fighters he will referee. The fighter and his handlers are given a final opportunity to ask

questions or share last-minute concerns. Once the fight starts, it is assumed that all parties are on the same page and understand what is expected.

Now it's show time. And since I am working the first fight, I head straight to the ring. This may be the last part of my job, but it's not the only part. In the past 36 hours, I have done my best to prepare myself for both the expected and unexpected. That's all anyone can ask.

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