

## **REFEREE'S CALL:**

### **MMA-101: Evolution**

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This is the second installment of a four-part series exploring both the circumstances that have contributed to the evolution of the MMA "Unified Rules", and the sports phenomenal growth.

History was made on 11/21/93, when War of the Worlds (WOW) promoted the first ever pay-per-view (PPV) Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), at the McNichols Arena, in Denver, Colorado. In an effort to determine which discipline would prevail, the UFC brought together eight international competitors representing a diverse sampling of martial arts, including karate; kung-fu; judo; wrestling, kickboxing; jiu-jitsu, and sumo.

Billed as a no holds barred competition, fights could only be won when a competitor was knocked out or tapped out. The rules allowed for an unlimited number of five-minute rounds, and disallowed only biting and eye gouging.

According to Rorion Gracie, co-founder of WOW with Art Davie and Semaphore Entertainment Group, "we never had rules, what we had was two restrictions: no eye gouging and no biting. But neither of those was forbidden. I knew from the beginning that once the fighters went in, you could not stop the fight, no matter what. If one guy eye gouges the other and we stop the fight, people would say, 'what kind of fight is this?' Everything was permitted. The consequences if you eye gouged the other guy or bit him would be a fine of one thousand dollars and the money would go to the guy who got bit or gouged."

Although no one was certain what to expect, the contemporary sport of MMA was born. Rorion's effort to publicize his sport was doubly rewarded; not only did it capture the imagination of both the television audience and those in attendance, but Joyce Gracie, Rorion's younger brother, won the tournament.

In an effort to capitalize on the success of UFC-1, UFC-2, 'No Way Out' was held on 03/11/94 at the Mammoth Gardens in Denver, Colorado. Once again, the rules stipulated that only biting and eye gouging were fouls.

There were no rounds or time limits, and once again, fights could only be won by knockout or tap-out. Although the promoter, SEG, wanted to eliminate the referee all together, the decision was made to have 'Big' John McCarthy serve as the referee. However, he was not allowed to stop a fight, even if a fighter was defenseless. At the end of the show, after a fight in which Patrick Smith severely beat Scott Morris, whose corner refused to throw in the towel to signal defeat, McCarthy told Rorion that he would not referee any more shows unless he had the authority to stop a one-sided fight. Rorion subsequently agreed, but stipulated that McCarthy use that power with discretion.

On 07/04/95, UFC-5, 'The Return of the Beast', was held in Charlotte, North Carolina. In an attempt to insure that pay-per-view (PPV) customers received their moneys worth, a time limit was instituted for the first time for the main event. This was the result of some fights in UFC-3 and UFC-4 exceeding their PPV time limits. This resulted in thousands of dollars in refunds being paid by the promoter to viewers whose PPV had stopped before the end of the bout. This was definitely no way to turn a profit!

UFC-5 also saw Ken Shamrock and Joyce Gracie take part in the very first 'Super fight'. Since there were no judges, and no way to determine a champion, at the end of the thirty-minute time limit, a five-minute overtime was fought. After thirty-five minutes the fight was declared a draw.

On 09/08/95, UFC-7, 'The Brawl in Buffalo' was held in Buffalo, N.Y. This was the first show in which time limits were instituted for all fights. By so doing, the promoter hoped to prevent the agony associated with paying expensive refunds to PPV customers. Unfortunately for the promoter, there was a power outage for about twenty minutes, which resulted in the show running much longer than expected. Many viewers never got to see Marco Ruas stop Paul "the Polar Bear" Varelans to become the UFC champion. Consequently, millions had to be refunded to subscribers once again. To say the least, this was not a profitable business model.

*To be continued...*

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