

One Judges Critique of The Ten Point Must Scoring System

By Nelson "Doc" Hamilton

It is fairly obvious to fans of the sport that there appears to be a growing discontent with many of the decisions following closely contested bouts. Likely the discontent would be far more pronounced if not for the fact that such a high percentage of the fights are concluded prior to reaching the score cards.

As one who has judged hundreds of bouts over the past decade, I'm firmly convinced that the major contributing factor to questionable decisions and the resultant discontent is the inadequacy of the present scoring system.

Pre Ten-Point Must Scoring

Prior to implementing 10-point must scoring, the outcome of a MMA competition was decided by a knockout or tap-out. Usually there was no designated time limit. However, on those occasions when a designated time limit was implemented and there wasn't a knockout or tap-out, the bout was declared a draw. This was true when MMA was an Olympic sport known as Pankration, in 648 BC, as well as when it transitioned into Brazilian ju-jitsu and Vale Tudo (anything goes) competition. There were no judges or weight divisions.

The Present System

Using the 10-Point Must Scoring System, with 10 points awarded to the winner of the round and nine points or less awarded to the loser, except for a rare even round which is scored 10-10, judges are required to determine the winner of each round that ends after the allotted five minute time limit has elapsed.

Official Scoring Criteria

1. **"Effective Striking"**: The total number of legal heavy strikes landed.
2. **"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.
3. **“Effective Aggressiveness”**: Moving forward and landing a legal strike while avoiding being struck, taken down and/or reversed.
4. **“Octagon Control”**: Dictating the pace, location and position of the contest using the following maneuvers:
- a. Countering an attempted takedown to remain standing.
 - b. Taking an opponent down to force a ground fight.
 - c. Creating threatening submission attempts while on the ground.
 - d. Creating striking opportunities while on the ground.

Evaluations should be made according to the order in which the above criterion appear, giving the most weight in scoring to effective striking, then effective grappling, then effective aggressiveness, and octagon control.

Judges should use a sliding scale and recognize the length of time the contestants are either standing or on the ground, as follows:

- 1. If the majority of a rounds action is on the ground;
 - a. **Effective** Grappling is weighed first
 - b. **Effective** Striking is then weighed
- 2. If the majority of a rounds action is standing;
 - a. **Effective** Striking is weighed first
 - b. **Effective** grappling is then weighed
- 3. If a rounds action is approximately 50% standing and 50% grounded, striking and grappling are scored equally.

SCORING EXAMPLES:

10-10 Round

Both contestants appear to be fighting evenly. Neither contestant distinguished himself via any of the above criteria or showed even a marginal dominance in the round.

10-9 Round

One contestant demonstrates an obvious advantage through the comparative extent of damage inflicted and/or grappling advantage displayed.

10-8 Round

One contestant overwhelmingly Damages and Dominates his opponent, either standing, on the ground, or both.

Specifically created for scoring boxing competition, the "ten-point must" has, in my opinion, proven to be inadequate when scoring closely contested rounds of MMA, which are significantly more multidimensional. As one who has refereed and judged hundreds of mixed martial arts contests, I am firmly convinced that the ten-point must scoring system as well as the supporting scoring criteria presently used can be improved. With that in mind, I submit the following for consideration.

Criteria Revisited

Although MMA competition is sport, at its core it is also a fight. And, usually the most obvious indication as to which fighter most likely is winning is the extent of damage evident. Damage is an objective sign that is easily recognized by the judges. Therefore, for scoring purposes, I believe that damage should be considered the first and most important criterion.

1. Damage: Any visible sign of injury such as a cut or bruise; appearing stunned from a blow to the head; wincing from a body blow; ceasing forward movement upon being struck; hastily retreating upon being struck; staggering or favoring a leg which has been kicked.

2. Effective Striking: The total number of legal heavy strikes landed. This includes fists, elbows, knees, and foot strikes while standing or on the ground.

3. Effective Grappling: The present definition is satisfactory. * However, when a submission is serious and threatening but 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 is going unrecognized in most cases. This can be rectified by having the referee make the determination that a near-submission has occurred and signaling this to the judges by raising one arm straight overhead and holding it until there is a Tapout or until the submission is terminated

4. Effective Aggressiveness: An effort to finish the fight by moving forward and setting the tempo of the contest while effectively scoring with legal strikes, takedowns, and submissions.

5. Octagon Control: The present definition is satisfactory.

Ten Point Must Revisited

"Controversial decisions" usually follow one of two scenarios:

1. Closely contested bouts in which there is minimal if any qualitative difference between the fighters for two rounds, and one round in which one fighter is obviously superior.

2. Closely contested bouts in which each fighter clearly wins a round, and one round in which neither fighter appears to be superior.

- The ten-point must system is adequate for scoring rounds in which one contestant is in control and obviously superior to his opponent. In other words, the score represents the qualitative difference between the combatants. However, for the following reasons, more often than not it comes up short when scoring very close rounds.
- The ten-point must system is inadequate when scoring very close rounds. A 10-9 decision in a very closely contested round is erroneously descriptive of the qualitative difference between the combatants and the manner in which the round was decided. Not only is a full point differential excessive, it frequently becomes the source of controversy.
- MMA bouts are primarily three rounds, five for title bouts. Therefore, losing a round or two by 10-9 constitutes 1/3 or 2/3 of the total score, making it virtually impossible for the losing fighter to win the fight absent a KO or submission. In other words, the overall value of a single point in mixed martial arts constitutes a far greater percentage of the overall score than in boxing, where the rounds may range from six to twelve. The greater number of rounds gives the boxer a greater opportunity to "come-back".
- An unwritten directive from most commissions is to avoid 10-10 scores at all costs. Although I understand the commissions' reasoning, awarding a 10-9 score because a commission frowns upon a tied score is not only unfair, it usually results in poor decisions, followed by controversy, which ultimately undermines the integrity of the sport.

Ten-point Must Scoring with Half-points. Using half-points allows judges to score bouts in a way that accurately reflects the qualitative difference between the combatants. By using half-points, judges may take into consideration both the "*scoring criteria*" and the "*margin by which*" each round is won. A fighter who wins a round either *marginally* based solely on the *degree of aggressiveness* (4) will not receive the same credit as a fighter who wins a round based on the *greater damage inflicted on his opponent* (1).

The overall scoring of a bout is not 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.

The half-point system has been a proven success when used to score international kickboxing as well as non-title boxing events in England. What follows is an abbreviated description of what justifies each score.

10-10 indicates an even round. Although seldom warranted, when used it generally reflects one of three circumstances.

1. A round in which neither fighter distinguished himself via any of the criteria noted above.
2. A round in which one fighter is dominant for half of the round and then his opponent comes back and exhibits equal dominance in half of the round.
3. A round in which both fighters take turns equally inflicting damage on each other, scoring equally with clean strikes and equal aggression.

10-9.5 indicates a round that is extremely close. Neither fighter inflicted greater damage on the other. One fighter may have marginally scored a greater number of strikes, or had a takedown, or marginally controlled the grappling, or demonstrated slightly more aggressiveness.

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

10-8.5 indicates a round in which the winner is quite obvious, exhibiting **dominance** throughout the entire round, **OR**, inflicting significant damage to his opponent.

10-8 indicates a round in which one fighter wins the round through the combination of **damage and domination** throughout the round, exhibiting obvious superiority in striking and/or grappling.

Although scores of 10-7.5 and 10-7 are theoretically possible, they are as improbable as a pound of hummingbird tongues. A fight so one-sided dictates a referee stoppage by TKO.

Implementing the half-point system will give judges added flexibility.

1. Arbitrarily awarding 10-9 so as to avoid a 10-10 score will no longer be an issue.

2. Using Half-point scores in a closely contested rounds more accurately reflect the qualitative action of that round, in contrast to a scoring a round 10-9 simply because there are no alternatives.

3. Using 1/2 point scoring such as 10-9.5 in two very close rounds of a three round fight or three very close rounds of a five round fight provides the opening for a *come-back* by the losing fighter if he wins two rounds by 10-9 score.

Resolving Draws

Generally speaking, when a fight is declared a draw nobody is pleased. This is particularly true when it occurs in a championship contest. Since we have the ability to resolve draws objectively, based on a fighter's performance, it is strongly advisable to officially eliminate draws from the MMA Unified Rules.

Criteria and procedure for resolving draws:

In addition to three judges scoring each bout, there is a designated fourth judge, the **Table Judge**. The 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.

- 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 total score 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***.