

REFEREE'S CALL:

When, Where, and Why (pt. 1 of 3)

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Although it is generally agreed that the Ten Commandments were carved in stone and are a divinely inspired set of rules, the same cannot be said for the rules governing society or those associated with mixed martial arts (MMA).

If you read my column in the May issue of *Grappling*, then you know that on Feb. 22, the California State Athletic Commission (CSAC) adopted the rules and regulations that will govern mixed martial arts (MMA) in the state.

While preparing my rules recommendations for the CSAC vote, I came to realize that the rules governing MMA, regardless of the promotional organization, have frequently evolved in direct response to the old adage, "Necessity is the mother of invention"

Since MMA in the United States originated with, and is inseparable from the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), the following time line will illustrate the evolving nature of the rules from UFC 1 through the adoption of the "MMA Unified Rules" and beyond. This is the first of three parts.

UFC I

As most of you know, on November 12, 1993, UFC I: "The Beginning," was held at McNichols Arena in Denver, Colorado. Billed as a no-holds-barred competition, fights could be won only 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.

However, according to (co-promoter) Rorion Gracie, "We never had rules.

What we had were 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 \$1,000, and the money would have gone to the guy who got bit or gouged."

UFC II

"No Way Out" was held on March 11, 1994, 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 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 authority to stop a one-sided fight. Rorion subsequently agreed, but he stipulated that McCarthy use that power with discretion.

UFC V

"The Return of the Beast" was held on July 4, 1995, in Charlotte, North Carolina. A time limit was instituted for the main event to insure that pay-per-view (PPV) customers received their money's worth. This was the result of some fights in UFC III and UFC IV exceeding their PPV time limits. This resulted in thousands of dollars in refunds being paid to viewers whose PPV had stopped before the end of the bout. Definitely a tough way to turn a profit!

UFC V also saw Ken Shamrock and Royce Gracie take part in the very first Superfight. Because there were no judges and no way to determine a champion, at the end of the 30-minute time limit, a five-minute overtime was fought. After 35 minutes, the fight was declared a draw.

UFC VII

"The Brawl in Buffalo" was held in Buffalo, New York, on September 8, 1995. Not wanting a repeat of the very expensive refunds previously experienced,

this was the first show in which time limits were instituted for all fights. Unfortunately for the promoter, there was a power outage for about 20 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.

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