



# ASSOCIATION OF BOXING COMMISSIONS AND COMBATIVE SPORTS UNIFIED RULES OF MIXED MARTIAL ARTS

AS APPROVED APRIL 2001. AMENDED 2010. AMENDED AUGUST 3, 2016. AMENDED WITH PROCEDURES JULY 26, 2017. AMENDED WITH PROCEDURES AUGUST 1, 2018. AMENDED WITH PROCEDURE AUGUST 1, 2019. AMENDED WITH PROCEDURES AUGUST 1, 2023.

**Note: These are the Official Unified Rules of MMA. Any other form of these rules may not be called the “Unified Rules of MMA” and shall be referred to by the name of the commission sanctioning the/an event.**

1. Each round shall consist of a five (5) minute duration (professional), with a one (1) minute rest period between rounds.
  - a. No contests shall exceed five (5) rounds and/or twenty-five (25) minutes.
  - b. Bouts may consist of one (1), two (2), three (3), four (4), or five (5) rounds, with a five (5) minute duration.
  - c. No contestant shall exceed competing more than five (5) rounds and/or twenty-five (25) minutes of fighting in a twenty-four (24) hour period.
2. The referee is the sole arbiter of a bout and is the only individual authorized to stop a contest. This shall not preclude a video or other review of a decision under the procedure of the applicable regulatory authority if a protest is filed claiming a clear rule violation.
  - a. The authority of a referee begins when the inspector(s) exit the cage/ring and does not end until the inspector(s) re-enter the cage/ring, upon conclusion of the fight.
3. Instant replay may be used to review a “Fight Ending Sequence” and shall only be used after a fight has been officially stopped. Once instant replay has been used to review a fight ending sequence, the fight shall not be resumed.
4. All fighters are required to wear a mouthpiece during competition. The round cannot begin without the mouthpiece. If the mouthpiece is dislodged during competition, the referee will call time and have the mouthpiece replaced at the first opportune moment, without interfering with the immediate action. Points may be deducted by the referee if he/she feels the mouthpiece is being purposefully spit out.
5. If an MMA bout is being conducted in a ring and is a fighter is knocked out of the ring, the fighter must return to the ring unassisted by spectators or his/her seconds. If assisted by anyone, the fighter may lose points or be disqualified with such a decision being within the sole discretion of the referee. Once knocked from the ring, the competitor will have five (5) minutes to return to fighting surface, similar to an accidental foul, but shall be examined by the ringside physician before returning to action.
6. The reapplication of petroleum jelly or another similar substance, to the face, may be allowed between rounds and shall only be applied by an approved cutman or licensed cornerman.
7. In instances where the fight has to be concluded due to unforeseen, non-combat related issues, the fight may go to the scorecards if:
  - a. If the bout is scheduled for 3 rounds, 2 rounds of the contest must be completed
  - b. If the bout is scheduled for 5 rounds, 3 rounds of the contest must be completed
8. Hand Wraps.

- a. A maximum of one roll (no more than 2" wide by 15 yards in length) of white, soft, cloth gauze is permitted per hand. The gauze may not exceed the wrist of the competitor's glove. The exposed thumb is an option to be protected.
  - b. A maximum of one roll (no more than 1.25" wide by 10' in length) of white athletic tape is permitted per hand. The tape may not exceed the wrist of the competitor's gloves. Tape may be placed through the fingers but may not cover the knuckles. The exposed thumb is an option to be protected.
  - c. A single layer of elastic or flex-type tape is allowed to be applied over the completed wrap.
  - d. Approved tape/gauze of all brands may be allowed.
9. Joint/Body Coverings.
- a. Other than the competitor's hands, there will be no taping, covering, or protective gear, of any kind, on the upper body. This includes, but is not limited to: joint sleeves, padding, or any form of brace/body tape.
  - b. A competitor may use a soft neoprene type sleeve to cover only the knee and/or ankle joints. Approved sleeves may not have: padding, Velcro, plastic, metal, ties, or any other material considered to be unsafe or that may create an unfair advantage. Tape, gauze, or any materials other than the approved sleeves are not permitted.
10. Cage/Ring Attire.
- a. All mixed martial artists will be required to wear such protective gear as deemed necessary by the Commission.
  - b. Male contestants shall not wear any form of clothing on their upper body.
  - c. Male and female mixed martial artists shall wear the appropriate trunks, mouthpiece, and gloves. Male mixed martial artists shall also wear the appropriate groin protection.
  - d. Female mixed martial artists shall wear a short sleeved (above the elbow) or sleeveless form fitting rash guard and/or sports bra(s). No loose-fitting tops and/or breast protectors shall be allowed. Female competitors will follow the same requirements for bottom covering as the male competitors, minus the requirement for groin protection.
  - e. The hem of the trunks may not extend below the knee.
  - f. Fighting shorts/trunks shall not have exposed Velcro, pockets, or zippers.
  - g. Mixed martial artists in the same match, contest, or exhibition may wear different color trunks or be designated by glove taping and/or glove coloring to the corner they are assigned.
  - h. Mixed martial artists shall not wear shoes in the cage or ring.
  - i. When deemed necessary by the referee all mixed martial artists shall have their hair secured in a manner that does not interfere with the vision and safety of either contestant.
    - i. No object can be worn to secure the contestant's hair which may cause injury to either contestant.
  - j. The wearing of jewelry will be strictly prohibited during all contests.
  - k. Wearing body cosmetics shall be prohibited during all contests. Wearing facial cosmetics shall be at the discretion of the commission and/or referee.

### **Standing up or Breaking Fighters**

The Referee shall either stand up or break the fighters when neither fighter is able to or fails to demonstrate real, significant and/or sustained effort to advance towards finishing the fight by any method. Simply maintaining what may be perceived as a superior position will not be considered effort to advance towards finishing the fight nor grounds for a guaranteed opportunity to maintain that position.

### **Fouls**

1. Butting with the head;

- a. The head may not be used as a striking instrument in any fashion. Any use of the head as a striking instrument whether head to head, head to body or otherwise is illegal.
2. Eye gouging of any kind;
  - a. Eye gouging by means of fingers, chin, or elbow is illegal. Legal strikes or punches that contact the fighter's eye socket are not eye gouging and shall be considered legal attacks.
3. Biting or spitting at an opponent;
  - a. Biting in any form is illegal. A fighter must recognize that a referee may not be able to physically observe some actions and must make the referee aware if they are being bit during an exhibition of unarmed combat.
4. Fish Hooking;
  - a. Any attempt by a fighter to use their fingers in a manner that attacks their opponent's mouth, nose or ears, stretching the skin to that area will be considered "Fish hooking". Fish hooking generally is the placing of fingers into the mouth of your opponent and pulling your hands in opposing directions while holding onto the skin of your opponent.
5. Hair pulling;
  - a. Pulling of the hair in any fashion is an illegal action. A fighter may not grab a hold of his opponent's hair to control their opponent in any way. If a fighter has long hair, they may not use their hair as a tool for holding or choking in any fashion.
6. Spiking the opponent to the canvas onto the head or neck (pile-driving);
  - a. Any throw with an arc to its motion is to be considered a legal throw. It does not matter if the opponent's head hits the canvas. A pile driver is considered to be any throw where you control your opponent's body placing their feet up in the air with their head straight down and then forcibly drives the opponent's head into the canvas or flooring material. It should be noted when a fighter is placed into a submission hold by their opponent, if that fighter is capable of elevating their opponent, they may bring that opponent down in any fashion they desire because they are not in control of their opponent's body. The fighter who is attempting the submission can either adjust their position or let go of their hold before being slammed to the canvas.
7. Strikes to the spine or the back of the head;
  - a. The back of the head starts at the Crown of the head with a one (1) inch variance to either side, running down the back of the head to the occipital junction.
  - b. This area stretches out at the occipital junction (nape of the neck) to cover the entire width of the neck. It then travels down the spine with a one (1) inch variance from the spine's centerline, including the tailbone.
8. Throat strikes of any kind and/or grabbing the trachea;
  - a. No directed throat strikes are allowed. A directed attack would include a fighter pulling his opponent's head in a way to open the neck area for a striking attack. A fighter may not gouge their fingers or thumb into their opponent's neck or trachea in an attempt to submit their opponent. If during stand-up action of a fight a strike is thrown and the strike lands in the throat area of the fighter, this shall be viewed as a clean and legal blow.
9. Fingers outstretched toward an opponent's face/eyes;
  - a. In the standing position, a fighter that moves their arm(s) toward their opponent with an open hand, fingers pointing at the opponent's face/eyes, will be a foul. Referees are to prevent this dangerous behavior by communicating clearly to fighters. Fighters are directed to close their fists or point their fingers straight up in the air when reaching toward their opponent.
10. Downward pointing elbow strike (12 to 6);
  - a. The use of a linear "straight up straight down" elbow strike is prohibited. Any variation of this straight up and down linear elbow strike makes the strike legal. Any arc, or any angle change

from straight up to straight down makes the strike legal. Any variation of position does not alter the legality of the strike.

11. Groin attacks of any kind;
  - a. Any attack to the groin area including, striking, grabbing, pinching or twisting is illegal. It should be clear that groin attacks are the same for men and women.
12. Kneeing and/or Kicking the head of a grounded opponent.
  - a. A grounded fighter is defined as: Anything other than the soles of the feet bearing weight.
13. Stomping of a grounded fighter.
  - a. Stomping is considered any type of striking action with the feet where the fighter lifts their leg up bending their leg at the knee and initiating a striking action with the bottom of their foot or heel.
  - b. Axe kicks are not stomping. Standing foot stops are NOT a foul. As such, this foul does not include stomping the feet of a standing fighter.
14. Holding opponent's gloves or shorts.
  - a. A fighter may not control their opponent's movement by holding onto their opponent's shorts or gloves. A fighter may hold onto or grab their opponent's hand as long as they are not controlling the hand only by using the material of the glove, but by actually gripping the hand of the opponent. It is legal to hold onto your own gloves or shorts.
15. Holding or grabbing the fence or ropes with fingers or toes;
  - a. A fighter may put their hands on the fence and push off of it at any time. A fighter may place their feet onto the cage and have their toes go through the fencing material at any time. When a fighter's fingers or toes go through the cage and grab hold of the fence and start to control either their body position or their opponent's body position it now becomes an illegal action. A fighter may not grab the ropes or wrap their arms over or under the ring ropes at any time. The fighter may not purposely step through the ropes. If a fighter is caught holding the fence, cage or ring rope material the referee may issue a one-point deduction from the offending fighters scorecard if the foul caused a substantial effect in the fight. If a point deduction for holding the fence occurs, and because of the infraction, the fouling fighter ends up in a superior position due to the foul, the fighters should be re-started by the referee, standing in a neutral position.
16. Small joint manipulation;
  - a. Fingers and Toes are small joints. Wrists, Ankles, Knees, Shoulders and Elbows are all large joints. Grabbing the majority of fingers/toes at once is allowed.
17. Throwing an opponent out of the ring or caged area;
  - a. A fighter shall not throw their opponent out of the ring or cage.
18. Intentionally placing a finger into any orifice, or into any cut or laceration of your Opponent;
  - a. A fighter may not place their fingers into an open laceration in an attempt to enlarge the cut. A fighter may not place their fingers into an opponent's, nose, ears, mouth, or any body cavity.
19. Clawing, pinching, twisting the flesh;
  - a. Any attack that targets the fighter's skin by clawing at the skin or attempting to pull or twist the skin to apply pain is illegal.
20. Timidity (avoiding contact, or consistently dropping the mouthpiece, or faking an injury);
  - a. Timidity is defined as any fighter who purposely avoids contact with his opponent or runs away from the action of the fight. Timidity can also be called by the referee for any attempt by a fighter to receive time by falsely claiming a foul, injury, or purposely dropping or spitting out their mouthpiece or other action designed to stall or delay the action of the fight
21. Use of abusive language in the fighting area.
  - a. The use of abusive language is not allowed during MMA competition. It is the sole responsibility of the referee to determine when language crosses over the line to abusive. It should be clear that fighters can talk during a match. The mere use of

auditory language is not a violation of this rule. Examples of abusive language would be (Racially motivated or Derogatory language).

22. Flagrant disregard of the referee's instructions;
  - a. A fighter **MUST** follow the instructions of the referee at all times. Any deviation or non-compliance may result in the fighter's disqualification.
23. Unsportsmanlike conduct that causes an injury to opponent;
  - a. Every athlete competing in the sport of MMA is expected to represent the sport in a positive light emphasizing sportsmanship and humility. Any athlete that disrespects the rules of the sport or attempts to inflict unnecessary harm on a competitor who has been either taken out of the competition by the referee or has tapped out of the competition shall be viewed as being unsportsmanlike.
24. Attacking an opponent after the bell has sounded the end of the period of unarmed combat.
  - a. The end of a round is signified by the sound of the bell and the call of time by the referee. Once the referee has made the call of time, any offensive actions initiated by the fighter shall be considered after the bell and illegal.
25. Attacking an opponent on or during the break;
  - a. A fighter shall not engage their opponent in any fashion during a time-out or break of action in competition.
26. Attacking an opponent who is under the care of the referee;
  - a. *Once the referee has called for a stop of the action to protect a fighter who has been incapacitated or is unable to continue to compete in the fight, fighters shall cease all offensive actions against their opponent.*
27. Interference from a mixed martial artist's corner or seconds;
  - a. Interference is defined as any action or activity aimed at disrupting the fight or causing an unfair advantage to be given to a corner's combatant. Corners are not allowed to distract the referee or influence the actions of the referee in any fashion.

#### **A. Intentional Fouls**

1. If an intentional foul causes an injury, and the injury is severe enough to terminate the bout immediately, the fighter causing the injury shall lose by disqualification.
2. If an intentional foul causes an injury and the bout is allowed to continue, the referee shall notify the authorities and deduct two (2) points from the fighter who caused the foul. Point deductions for intentional fouls will be mandatory.
3. If an intentional foul causes a laceration and/or swelling and the bout is allowed to continue, and the injury results in the fight being stopped in any round after  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the scheduled rounds, of the fight has been completed, by either another legal or illegal strike, the injured fighter will win by TECHNICAL DECISION if they are ahead on the score cards; and the bout will result in a TECHNICAL DRAW if the injured fighter is behind or even on the score cards.
4. If the fighter injures himself/herself while attempting to intentionally foul their opponent, the referee will not act in their favor, and this injury shall be the same as one produced by a fair blow.
5. If the referee feels that a fighter has conducted themselves in an unsportsmanlike manner, they may stop the action of the fight to deduct points or stop the bout to disqualify the fighter.

#### **B. Accidental Fouls**

1. If an accidental foul causes an injury severe enough for the referee to stop the bout, the bout will result in either a NO CONTEST or DISQUALIFICATION if stopped before  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the scheduled rounds
2. If an accidental foul causes an injury severe enough for the referee to stop the bout after  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the scheduled rounds, the bout will result in a TECHNICAL DECISION awarded to the fighter who is ahead on the score cards at the time the bout is stopped.

- i. Partial or incomplete rounds will be scored. If no action has occurred, the round should be scored as an even round. This is at the discretion of the judges.
3. If a fighter, during the course of a round, visibly loses control of bodily function (vomit, urine, feces), the fight shall be stopped by the referee and the fighter shall lose the contest by a Technical Knockout (TKO) due to Medical Stoppage.
  - i. In the event a loss of bodily function occurs in the rest period between rounds, the ringside physician shall be called in to evaluate if the combatant can continue. If the combatant is not cleared by the ringside physician to continue, that combatant shall lose by a Technical Knockout (TKO) due to Medical Stoppage.
  - ii. If fecal matter becomes apparent at any time, the contest shall be halted by the referee, and the offending combatant shall lose by a Technical Knockout (TKO) due to Medical Stoppage

**C. Foul Procedures:** If a foul is committed, the referee shall:

1. Call Time;
2. Check the fouled mixed martial artist's condition and safety; and
3. Assess the foul for potential point(s) deductions and/or time considerations.
4. During all time out procedures, there shall be no coaching of a contestant permitted.

**D. Eye Poke Foul Procedure:**

1. Once the Referee calls time for the foul, the fighter is permitted the use of a cold compress or wet towel on the injured eye.
  2. Unless the fighter requires immediate medical attention the Referee and Ringside Physician shall allow the fighter time to compose themselves so the fighter can then give a verbal "yes" or "no" that they can see.
- **This procedure does not preclude the Ringside Physician from being able to evaluate the injury at any time during the timeout.**

**E. Time Consideration:**

1. If a foul to the groin or eye poke occurs and the competitor is able to continue, the fouled contestant may have up to five (5) minutes to recover.
2. Fighters injured severely enough by a foul to require medical consultation may be given up to five (5) minutes, at the referee's discretion, for evaluation by the ringside physician before a decision to continue is rendered.
3. At no time may a referee call a timeout to evaluate the impact of a legal strike, other than when a laceration is present.

**F. Utilizing a Cutperson after a foul but during a round:**

1. When a Fighter is the recipient of either an accidental or intentional foul and receives a laceration from the illegal action, the Referee in charge after calling time and putting the fighters into neutral corners MAY call upon the cutperson assigned (or in regional shows a corner with no coaching permitted) to the injured fighters corner to enter the cage during the 5-minute break and administer aid to the cut to help stop the bleeding. Then when cleared by the Ringside Physician the fighter can return to the action, with no more than the 5-minute time elapsed. The cutperson may only work on the cut or cuts associated with the foul.

**A. Judging Criteria**

- a. All bouts will be evaluated and scored by a minimum of three (3) judges.
- b. The 10 Point Must System will be the standard of scoring about.
  - i. Under the 10-Point Must Scoring System, 10 points must be awarded to the winner of the round and nine points or less must be awarded to the loser, except for a rare even round, which is scored (10-10).
- c. Judges shall evaluate Mixed Martial Arts techniques, such as effective striking/grappling(Plan A), effective aggressiveness(Plan B),and control of the fighting

area(Plan C).Plans B and C are not taken into consideration unless Plan A is weighed as being even.

**d.** Evaluations shall be made in the specific order in which the techniques appear in (c)above ,giving the most weight in scoring to effective striking/grappling, and effective aggressiveness, and control of the fighting area.

**e.** Effective striking is judged by determining the impact/effect of legal strikes landed by a contestant solely based on the results of such legal strikes. Effective grappling is assessed by the successful executions and impactful/effective result(s)coming from: takedown(s), submission attempt(s), achieving an advantageous position(s) and reversal(s).

**f.** Effective aggressiveness means aggressively making attempts to finish the fight.

**g.** Fighting area control is assessed by determining who is dictating the pace, place and position of the bout.

1.Thefollowing objective scoring criteria shall be utilized by the judges when scoring a round:

(i) Around is to be scored as a 10-10 Round when both contestants have competed for whatever duration of time in the round and there is no difference or advantage between either fighter;

(ii)Around is to be scored as a 10-9 Round when a contestant wins by a close margin; where the winning fighter lands the better strikes or utilizes effective grappling during the round;

(iii)A round is to be scored as a 10-8 Round when a contestant wins the round by a large margin by impact, dominance, and duration of striking or grappling in a round.

(iv)A round is to be scored as a 10-7 Round when a contestant is completely dominated by impact, dominance, and duration of striking or grappling in a round.

2. Impact: A judge shall assess if a fighter impacts their opponent significantly in the round, even though they may not have dominated the action. Impact includes visible evidence such as swelling and lacerations. Impact shall also be assessed when a fighter's actions, using striking and/or grappling, lead to a diminishing of their opponent's energy, confidence, abilities and spirit. All of these come as a direct result of impact. When a fighter is impacted by strikes, by lack of control and/or ability, this can create defining moments in the round and shall be assessed with great value.

3. Dominance: As MMA is an offensive based sport, dominance of a round can be seen in striking when the losing fighter is forced to continually defend, with no counters or reaction taken when openings present themselves. Dominance in the grappling phase can be seen by fighter staking dominant positions in the fight and utilizing those positions to attempt fight ending submissions or attacks. Merely holding a dominant position(s) shall not be a primary factor in assessing dominance. What the fighter does with those positions is what must be assessed. In the absence of dominance in the grappling phase, as set forth in paragraph 3 of the promulgated rules, to be considered dominate, there must be a singularly or in combination, some types of submission attempts, strikes, or an overwhelming pace which is measured by improved or aggressive positional changes that cause the losing fighter to consistently be in a defensive or reactive mode

4. Duration: Duration is defined by the time spent by one fighter effectively attacking, controlling, and impacting their opponent; while the opponent offers little to no offensive output. A judge shall assess duration by recognizing the relative time in a round when one fighter takes and maintains full control of the effective offense. This can be assessed both standing and grounded.

5. Scoring of Incomplete Rounds: There should be scoring of incomplete rounds. If the referee penalizes either contestant, then the appropriate points shall be deducted when the scorekeeper calculates the final score for the partial round

## **B. Types of Decisions**

- a. Submission by:
  - i. Tap Out: When a contestant physically uses of their body to indicate that he or she no longer wishes to continue; or
  - ii. Verbal Tap Out: When a contestant verbally announces or voluntarily/involuntarily screams in pain or distress to the referee that they do not wish to continue;
  - iii. Technical Submission: When a legal submission act results in unconsciousness or broken/dislocated bone(s)/joint(s).
  
- b. Technical Knockout (TKO) by:
  - i. Referee Stoppage: the referee stops the contest because the combatant IS NOT INTELLIGENTLY DEFENDING HIMSELF/HERSELF;
    - 1. Strikes
    - 2. Laceration
    - 3. Corner Stoppage
    - 4. Did Not Answer the Bell
  
  - ii. TKO due to Medical Stoppage;
    - 1. Laceration
    - 2. Doctor Stoppage
    - 3. Loss of control of bodily function.
  
- c. Knockout (KO) by:
  - i. Referee Stoppage: the referee stops the contest because the combatant CANNOT INTELLIGENTLY DEFEND HIMSELF/HERSELF.
    - 1. Due to Strikes
  
- d. Disqualification:
  - i. When an injury sustained during competition as a result of an intentional foul is severe enough to terminate the contest, multiple fouls have been assessed, and/or there is flagrant disregard for the rules and/or referee's commands.
  
- e. No Contest:
  - i. When a contestant is prematurely stopped due to accidental injury and a sufficient amount of time has not been completed to render a decision via the score cards.
  
- f. Decisions:
  - i. Unanimous Decision: When all three judges score the bout for the same contestant;
  - ii. Split Decision: When two judges score the bout for one contestant and one judge scores for the opponent; or
  - iii. Majority Decision: When two judges score the bout for the same contestant and one judge scores a draw;
  - iv. Technical Decision: When a bout is prematurely stopped due to injury from an accidental foul and a contestant is leading on the score cards;
  
- g. Draws:
  - i. Unanimous Draw – When all three judges score the bout a draw;
  - ii. Majority Draw – When two judges score the bout a draw; or
  - iii. Split Draw – When all three judges score differently and the score total results in a draw;



iv. Technical Draw - When an injury is sustained during competition as a result of an intentional foul and the bout is allowed to continue, then later the injury requires stoppage from either a legal or illegal strike to the affected area after ½ of the scheduled rounds has been completed, if the injured contestant is even or behind on the score cards at the time of stoppage, the decision is a Technical Draw.

## **Weight Classes**

### **Weight Class**

Atomweight  
Straw Weight  
Flyweight  
Bantamweight  
Featherweight  
Lightweight  
Super Lightweight  
Welterweight  
Super Welterweight  
Middleweight  
Super Middleweight  
Light Heavyweight  
Cruiserweight  
Heavyweight  
Super Heavyweight

### **Weight**

up to and including 105 lbs.  
over 105 to 115 lbs.  
over 115 to 125 lbs.  
over 125 to 135 lbs.  
over 135 to 145 lbs.  
over 145 to 155 lbs.  
over 155 to 165 lbs.  
over 165 to 170 lbs.  
over 170 to 175 lbs.  
over 175 to 185 lbs.  
over 185 to 195 lbs.  
over 195 to 205 lbs.  
over 205 to 225 lbs.  
over 225 to 265 lbs.  
over 265 lbs.

*a. **Allowances within Division:** there are no allowance restrictions if both combatants weigh-in within the same contracted division.*

*b. **Weight Miss Catch Weight:** If a person misses the contracted weight and the two competitors are in different weight classes, the heavier opponent shall not exceed five (5) lbs. of the lower weighing fighter.*

*c. **Contracted Catch Weight(s):** there is no weight spread allowance between contracted catch weight fighters, so long as both competitors are below the contracted weight. Commissions may deny Catch Weight fights if they see the weight differential as a large enough disparity to the safety of either of the fighters.*