

Cage Fighting is Not a Sport: Fact Sheet

I. Mixed Martial Arts, or MMA, is a spectacle of violence in which severe bodily harm and humiliation are possible outcomes.

Unlike established martial arts such as judo, MMA, whose most prominent promoter is the Las Vegas-based Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), is a hybrid of traditional and non-traditional fight maneuvers (e.g., boxing, kicking, kneeling, elbowing, wrestling and strangling) that do not fit into a comprehensive system of self-defense.

- a. Punches and elbows to grounded opponents are not prohibited under the Unified Rules of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), a uniform set of rules for professional cage fighting events in the United States.¹
- b. The types of strikes that are permitted in cage fighting in the U.S. include blows with hands, feet, knees and elbows.² In the UFC, cage fighters have knocked out opponents with punches or kicks to the head.³ According to a 2006 study, facial laceration was the most common injury in professional MMA competitions, accounting for nearly half of all injuries (47.9%) followed by hand (13.5%), nose (10.4%) and eye (8.3%).⁴
- c. In the UFC, a cage fighter is allowed to deliver a flurry of strikes to a grounded opponent, which is known as “ground and pound.”⁵ By contrast, punching and other strikes are prohibited in international judo competitions.
- d. Competitors in MMA are allowed to quit a fight by tapping the ground or the opponent with their hands. This is known in MMA as “tapping out” or a “tapout.”⁶ However, fighters who tap out also lose the contest, which can be a blow to their reputation and earnings. As a result, fighters avoid tapping out as long as possible.
 - a. Associated Press reported that Jon Jones, a championship UFC fighter, said he would rather let his arm break than tap out of a fight.⁷
 - b. Josh Musick, another professional MMA fighter, was quoted by *The Sentinel-Echo* in Kentucky as saying, “I will never tap out. You can break my arm off and take it home with you, but I will never tap out.”⁸
 - c. Enson Inoue, a professional MMA fighter, was quoted in *The Honolulu Advertiser* as saying, “I guarantee the fans two things. One, I will give everything I have — I will move until I cannot move anymore. And two, I will never, ever give up. I would rather die than tap out (to signal a submission).”⁹
- e. In the UFC, fighters are allowed to use choke holds, also known as “submission holds.”¹⁰ According to the UFC’s website, a choke hold occurs when “pressure is applied to the neck in an attempt to cut off blood flow to the brain.”¹¹ The goal of choke holds is to get an opponent “to tap out or lose consciousness,” according to the UFC website.¹² “Once a fighter is locked in a submission hold, they can tap out or verbally submit to avoid injury or passing out.”¹³ In some MMA fights, fighters have collapsed or passed out from choke holds.¹⁴
- f. UFC fighter Nate Diaz was quoted by *USA Today* as saying of MMA, “We’re out there trying to damage each other and finish each other. We’re trying to take each other out. We both want to win by knockout or submission or some type of finish rather than decision. I think that’s pretty unsportsmanlike in itself.”¹⁵

II. Cage fighters at the amateur and professional levels have competed in public stadiums and on television bearing Neo-Nazi messages in their tattoos and on their clothing.

- a. In 2011, an amateur MMA fighter and white supremacist, David Joseph Pedersen, competed in two Full Contact Fighting Federation-sanctioned events in Oregon.¹⁶ Pedersen has competed shirtless wearing tattoos on his chest,¹⁷ including tattoos of a swastika and a “Celtic Cross,” a popular symbol among white supremacists.¹⁸ *The Oregonian* reported that a referee at one of Pedersen’s cage fights recalled Pedersen’s tattoos of a swastika and a face resembling Adolf Hitler.¹⁹
 - In March 2012, Pederson pleaded guilty to aggravated murder in the shooting death of his father and stabbing death of his stepmother.²⁰
 - In August 2012, federal authorities indicted Pedersen and Holly Ann Grigsby on racketeering charges in connection with an alleged 10-day crime spree that spanned from Washington to California and included four murders, according to a federal indictment.²¹
 - An affidavit filed with the charges against Pedersen and Grigsby states that when Grigsby was arrested in October 2011, she told detectives that she and Pedersen “were on their way to Sacramento to ‘kill more Jews’.”²²
 - Pedersen and Grigsby were charged by federal authorities with being “members of a criminal enterprise whose members and associates engaged in acts of violence and other criminal activity to promote a white supremacist movement to ‘purify’ and ‘preserve’ the white race.”²³ They were charged with “targeting Jewish leaders, members of prominent Jewish organizations and other ‘Zionists,’ and using the media to publicize their movement in an attempt to spark a revolution.”²⁴
- b. In 2009, then-UFC fighter Joe Brammer appeared on national television in the U.S. wearing a Hoelzer Reich shirt.²⁵ Brammer’s shirt had iron crosses, a symbol associated with Adolf Hitler and frequently used as a hate symbol.²⁶ The skulls on Hoelzer Reich shirts are “carbon copies of the skulls that were on SS uniforms.”²⁷
 - Hoelzer Reich Clothing says on its website that it was banned by the UFC/WEC and Strikeforce, another professional MMA organization.²⁸ However, Hoelzer Reich says that, despite the ban, “We continue to produce BAD ASS clothing that represents family heritage, our absolute love of German imagery, and our widespread, unique fan base.”²⁹
 - Hoelzer Reich Clothing says on its website that it sponsored Donald “Cowboy” Cerrone,³⁰ who is currently a fighter in the UFC.³¹
- c. Brandon C. Saling has a tattoo of the numbers “88.” The number “88” is used by neo-Nazis as shorthand for the Nazi greeting “Heil Hitler.”³² Saling also is listed in Ohio’s sex offender registry for the offense of “gross sexual imposition.”³³ On March 3, 2012, Saling competed before thousands of fans at the Nationwide Arena in Columbus, Ohio, in an event held by Strikeforce, another cage fighting promotion owned by Zuffa.³⁴ The event was broadcast on the Showtime television network in the U.S.³⁵
- d. Niko Puhakka is a MMA fighter from Finland who has a tattoo “Blood & Honor” on his chest,³⁶ which is a neo-Nazi symbol³⁷. According to a report by Polskie Radio, “During bouts organized by KSW, the premiere mixed martial arts organization in Poland, Puhakka showed off his naked chest with the neo-Nazi organization Blood & Honour tattooed on his chest.”³⁸ Citing “negative feedback” from the public, KSW in January 2012 dropped

Puhakka from an event in Plock, Poland.³⁹ After Puhakka was dropped from a British Association of Mixed Martial Arts (BAMMA) event in December 2011, *The Nottingham Evening Post* reported that Puhakka “sports several Nazi-inspired tattoos and has a long-standing sponsoring deal with Hoelzer Reich.”⁴⁰ On its website, Hoelzer Reich Clothing identifies Puhakka as one of the “notable fighters” it sponsored.⁴¹

- e. In 2010, the US civil rights group Southern Poverty Law Center warned of the connection between clothing company Hoelzer Reich and some MMA fighters, even though three major MMA leagues, including the UFC, have banned the clothing company. “Hoelzer Reich’s enlistment of fighters is troubling because of many of MMA’s skyrocketing popularity with young men aged 18-34 – a prized demographic not only for advertisers, but also for white supremacist recruiters,” the SPLC wrote in its Fall 2010 Intelligence Report.⁴²
- f. In 2008, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported that MMA is popular among racist skinheads.⁴³ According to the SPLC, many white supremacist online forums had established discussion groups devoted to MMA, and that skinhead gangs across the U.S. were raising money by hosting illegal backyard tournaments. “Not surprisingly, this rapidly rising blood sport is likewise wildly popular among racist skinheads and other young extremists with a thirst for violence.”⁴⁴

III. MMA does not fit the Council of Europe’s definition of sport.

The Council of Europe defines sport as “all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels.”⁴⁵

- a. MMA events, including those promoted by the UFC, are often held in enclosed cage structures, with chain link fencing,⁴⁶ rather than rings or open mats. The cage fences reinforce the barbarous and animal-like nature of MMA fights. In the UFC, fighters can use the cage as leverage to strike the opponent.⁴⁷
- b. MMA fights can be deadly. At least four MMA competitors from the United States are reported to have died from injuries sustained during amateur or professional cage fights.
 - In May 2012, Dustin Jenson of South Dakota died one week after competing following an unregulated MMA event.⁴⁸ An autopsy showed that Jenson, a husband and father, died from bleeding on his brain after he received blunt force trauma to his brain.⁴⁹
 - In June 2010, fighter Michael Kirkham died from a brain hemorrhage after receiving multiple head blows during a professional contest in Aiken, South Carolina.⁵⁰
 - In November 2007, fighter Sam Vasquez died of complications from blunt trauma to the head after being knocked out during a sanctioned professional bout in Houston, Texas.⁵¹ Vasquez underwent two surgeries to remove blood clots to his brain before passing.⁵²
 - In March 1998, Douglas Dedge of Florida died of severe brain injuries following a MMA event in Kiev, Ukraine.⁵³
- c. In UFC events, fights have been allowed to continue even in cases where a participant is bleeding from the head or face.
 - In a UFC bout on Nov. 17, 2012, one of the fighters suffered a cut from an elbow strike early in the contest, and the blood from that strike “would be across his face for the next 20 minutes,” according to a description of the contest in *USA Today*.⁵⁴

- In a UFC championship bout in January 2008, one of the fighters, Joe Stevenson, suffered a cut in the first round that “drew a geyser of blood” from his forehead according to the *Washington Post*.⁵⁵ “The fight was halted for the doctor to check the gaping wound on Stevenson's face, but he was allowed to continue despite the crimson stripe of blood staining him,” according to an account of the fight by *ESPN.com*.⁵⁶ After the fight, *ESPN* quoted UFC president Dana White as saying, “I mean that was a nasty cut, that thing was pouring blood and I think that affected the fight big time.”⁵⁷
- d. ABC News quoted an MMA referee from Australia saying he was surprised when he saw MMA fighters competing in amateur events in Australia in the cage without having their blood tests completed, to determine if the fighters are clear of H.I.V., hepatitis and other blood borne diseases.⁵⁸

IV. Regulators and promoters of professional MMA have so far failed to establish clear and consistent standards for preventing the use of performance enhancing drugs (PEDs).

- a. In recent years, a number of prominent fighters in the UFC and other U.S.-based MMA organizations have failed drug tests.
 - In November 2012, both UFC fighters Stephan Bonnar and Dave Herman tested positive for banned substances following an event in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.⁵⁹
 - In October 2012, both UFC fighters Matt Riddle and Francisco Rivera tested positive for banned substances following an event in Calgary, Alberta.⁶⁰
 - In March 2012, UFC heavyweight champion contender Alistair Overeem produced a testosterone-to-epitestosterone (T/E) ratio of 14 to 1, more than twice the 6-to-1 limit in Nevada.⁶¹
 - In December 2011, Strikeforce fighter Cristiane Justino Santos, also known as “Cyborg,” tested positive for stanozolol metabolites, a form of anabolic steroid.⁶²
 - In January 2012, Strikeforce fighter Adekunle Muhammed “King Mo” Lawal tested positive for anabolic steroids.⁶³
 - In December 2010, UFC light heavyweight Chael Sonnen showed elevated testosterone levels in a test by the California State Athletic Commission, following a title fight.⁶⁴ In May 2012, Sonnen was granted a “Therapeutic Use Exemption” by the Nevada Athletic Commission, after Sonnen testified to the Nevada commission that he had a medical justification for taking testosterone.⁶⁵
 - In July 2007, both UFC fighters Sean Sherk and contender Hermes Franca tested positive for steroids following a title bout.⁶⁶
 - Other current or former UFC fighters who have tested positive for banned substances include: Josh Barnett⁶⁷, Kimo Leopoldo⁶⁸, Nate Marquardt⁶⁹, Anthony Torres⁷⁰, Karo Parisyan⁷¹, and Chris Leben.⁷²
- b. Standards against doping in professional MMA are inconsistent and not as stringent as those enforced by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).
 - In Nevada, a major market for MMA events, anti-doping standards are below those used by WADA. Nevada State Athletic Commission allows for a testosterone-to-epitestosterone (T/E) ratio of 6 to 1, which is 50 percent higher than the WADA

maximum T/E ratio of 4 to 1.⁷³ An elevated T/E ratio may be an indicator of a prohibited substance, according to WADA.⁷⁴

- The UFC, the world's largest MMA promoter, administers its own drug testing for cage fighting events in locations, such as Brazil, Japan and the United Kingdom, where a regulatory agency does not conduct drug testing.⁷⁵ *ESPN* quoted Mark Ratner, the UFC's vice president of regulatory affairs as saying, "When we go to these different countries, in order to grow the sport, without athletic commissions supervising, we self-regulate."⁷⁶
- c. According to an October 2012 article in *Sports Illustrated* on drug testing in combat sports, the standards for drug testing in the U.S. vary significantly by state. "Some regulatory bodies test combatants on a regular basis prior to and/or after events (The NSAC also does random, out-of-competition drug testing); others test athletes sporadically and some don't test at all."⁷⁷
- d. In January 2012, the UFC announced that all of its competitors would be tested for PEDs "prior to finalizing a contract."⁷⁸ The new pre-contract testing policy was criticized by Dick Pound, the former president of the World Anti-Doping Agency and one-time vice president of the International Olympic Committee, as inadequate.
 - Dick Pound was quoted by *Canadian Press* as saying of the UFC's policy, "It's complete [sic] illusory and obviously intended to be that way. The minute you know when you'll be tested, it's very easy to make sure you don't test positive."⁷⁹
- e. UFC president Dana White has publicly dismissed the idea of random drug testing in the UFC as unrealistic. In April 2012, White said it was "impossible" to conduct random drug tests of fighters under contract with the UFC who are competing at events worldwide.⁸⁰
- f. Some state-administered athletic commissions in the U.S. issue a "Therapeutic Use Exemption," that permits MMA fighters to use banned substances in cases where the use of the banned substance is medically necessary.⁸¹
- g. The standards for issuing TUEs vary by state and are not as stringent as international standards. For instance, under the World Anti-Doping Code's "International Standard for TUE," all TUEs must be approved by a panel of independent physicians⁸². In addition, under the international standard, the World Anti-Doping Agency has the right to monitor and reverse the decisions made by these panels.⁸³ In Nevada, the state athletic commission grants TUEs on an individual basis without additional oversight.⁸⁴
 - Some suggest that fighters in the U.S. are exploiting the TUE process to dope legally in preparation for MMA fights.⁸⁵ *Yahoo! Sports* quoted UFC fighter Frank Trigg as saying of TUE use in MMA, "There is a loophole that exists and guys are taking advantage of it."⁸⁶ *Yahoo! Sports* also quoted Greg Sirb, executive director of the Pennsylvania State Athletic Commission, as saying, of TUE use, "I think it really has no business in sports. It's dangerous, because you create a huge loophole when you allow one."⁸⁷
 - Travis Tygart, chief executive officer of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, was quoted by *Yahoo! Sports* as saying it is difficult for state-administered athletic commissions to effectively police doping in MMA. Tygart was quoted by *Yahoo! Sports* as saying, "A state commission that turns over every few years based upon politics can't possibly develop the expertise to do this in a consistent, uniform, fair way."⁸⁸

V. UFC-branded MMA sets a negative example for young people.

UFC fighters, and even its President, have made numerous anti-social comments that violate the principles of respect, honor and self-control -- principles emphasized by traditional martial arts, such as judo and jiu-jitsu.

- a. UFC fighters, and others associated with the organization, have made homophobic slurs, jokes about rape and sexually explicit remarks that are demeaning towards women.
 - o In a disturbing online video published in April on YouTube, UFC fighter Quinton “Rampage” Jackson makes light of rape. In the video titled “How To Pick Up A Gurl – Fast,” Jackson suggests using zip ties and chloroform to sexually assault a woman who, he hopes, has “low self-esteem.”⁸⁹ The video shows Jackson attempting to sexually assault a woman, but when she turns around, he sees that she is instead a man who then tries to rape Jackson.⁹⁰ The video ends with Rampage saying, “It’s a damn dude, man, that’s fucking disgusting.”⁹¹
 - o In December 2011, UFC fighter Rashad Evens taunted his opponent by threatening to act like Penn State University assistant football coach Jerry Sandusky, who has since been convicted of more than 40 counts of molesting boys. Evans said, “I’m gonna put those hands on you worse than that dude did them other kids at Penn State.”⁹²
 - o UFC fighter Chael Sonnen appeared in an online video giving advice to young people on fighting. “If he slaps you punch him. If he punches you, kick him. If he kicks you, stab him. If he stabs you, shoot him. If he shoots you, you go kill his family.” Although Sonnen mentioned in the same speech “I hope that we’re old enough that I can tell this without people taking it for something that it’s not” and “of course I’m not talking about hurting someone,” the young audience he was addressing might have been impressed or misled.⁹³
 - o People associated with the UFC have posted offensive remarks on their Twitter accounts.
 - o In 2011, UFC competitor Forrest Griffin tweeted, “Rape is the new missionary.”⁹⁴ Griffin apologized for the remark and made a donation to a rape crisis center.⁹⁵
 - o UFC fighter Miguel Torres was briefly released by the UFC after he posted the following comment on his Twitter account: “If a rape van was called a surprise van more women wouldn’t mind going for rides in them.”⁹⁶ Torres was reinstated by the UFC less than a month later after he apologized for the rape tweet and made donations to several rape crisis centers.⁹⁷
 - o In an expletive-filled video rant posted on YouTube.com, UFC president Dana White used an anti-gay slur, saying, “Whoever gave you that quote is a pussy and a fucking faggot and a fucking liar and everything else.”⁹⁸ He then referred to a female sports journalist as a “[expletive] dumb bitch.”⁹⁹
 - o UFC fighter Rampage Jackson repeatedly urged fans in Japan, who did not appear to understand English, to say, “I am a faggot,” and “I have big tits,” among other offensive comments in a video last year.¹⁰⁰ Even after LGBT organizations last fall called attention to these slurs,¹⁰¹ the UFC still allowed Jackson to compete in a televised UFC event in Tokyo, Japan.¹⁰²
 - o In a video posted on YouTube, UFC fighter Alistair Overeem unfastened the bras of multiple women while holding a drink in one hand.¹⁰³ The women in the video wore animal masks to cover their faces.¹⁰⁴

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