

The Sport of Mixed Martial Arts

New Mexico State University

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Sports are some of the most ancient way of entertaining society. Some date back to ancient Greece and the times of the Roman Empire. Back then, gladiators were treated as heroes as they fought their battles. Nowadays a wider variety of sports exist like baseball, volleyball, soccer, football and many others, but the most controversial type of sports is combat sports. Every person in the planet is different and due to that, everyone has his or her own way of thinking. It is for this reason that different point of views can be generated with respect to one topic and with this inevitable disputes are born. This paper is addressed to the general population that wish to know more about these combat sports, to fanatics, as well as those who are against these type of activities. In this paper fighting sports mostly mixed martial arts fights will be analyzed, due to the controversy they generate within society. Combat sports have been evolving through time, turning themselves into a professional sport and not just an act of violence between competitors because of three main reasons.

In the book "*Why we watch: The attractions of violent entertainment*" according to Goldstein (1998), is stated in the ancient times of the Roman Empire people attended the coliseum to watch an entertaining deadly match between gladiators. These gladiators became more popular with each combat they won and sometimes were treated as heroes. Later in history, matches between knights, like jousting or fencing, were held in medieval ages. This matches brought death to one of the competitors as well. This type of behaviors has continued through time until they reached a new more sophisticated type of combat. These violent behaviors are seen as any other sport in the present. Sports like boxing and mixed martial arts fights are now one of the most popular sports within society.

The first mixed martial arts matches had almost no rules and were an all-out battle between competitors. Some might accept that these matches were violent and uneven because Sumo wrestlers were matched with Muay Thai fighters or boxers with kick boxers. Due to the violence fact many countries prohibited these fights. Regionally speaking the majority of the states in the United States banned MMA fights. Even though they were illegal they still were practiced in some states. After some time, many regulations were applied to these fights and they started evolving. Gloves had to be used in fights and the match arena had to be modified to be appropriate for this type of combat. Even though they were more regulated a few states would not accept them and that is why weight classes, medical examinations and forbidden zones for hitting were implemented. As time passed more regulations and rules were implemented to the fights and little by little they became a complete sport.

Referring to the interview of Robert Reilly in the article “Extreme sports” (Clemmit, 2009) mixed martial arts combats are full of violence. Dangerous moves, like hitting the head with the knee or elbow, can be utilized against the opponent. He mentions that some studies indicated that a high percentage of a selection of MMA fights ended with an injured competitor. He bases his opinion on “medical evidence” as he says, and he also encourages the prohibition of such sport based on the belief that allowing society to have a direct contact with mixed martial arts would turn them in violent beings.

At present there exists a wide variety of sports that are very dangerous but less violent than MMA fights. These activities are called extreme sports and their principal purpose is to generate an adrenaline rush in the performer’s body. These so called extreme sports generate more injuries that some sports that involve fighting. Statistics and recent research prove that

within the injuries caused by extreme sports, if we include boxing and MMA fights, the majority of these injuries are caused by sports that have less or no physical contact between competitors.

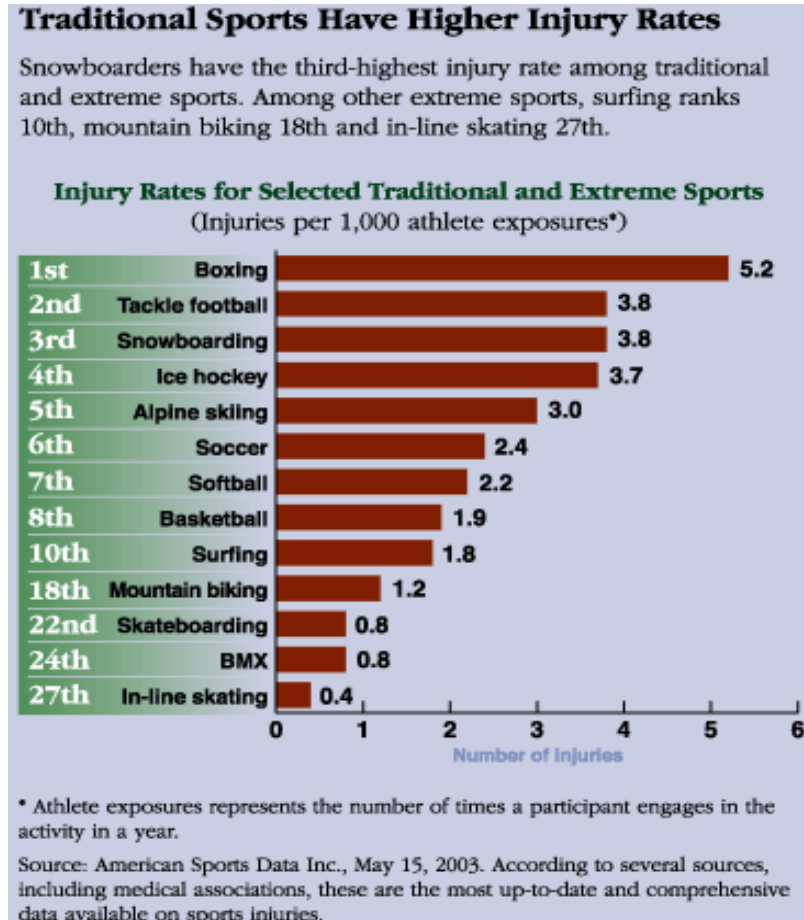


Figure 1. “Extreme sports” (Clemmit, 2009, pg 301). In figure 1 we can observe statistics of athletes injured while performing an extreme sports. Fighting sports occupy the first places, but other sports come a close second whit not much difference

As mentioned in the article “Extreme sports” (Clemmit, 2009, pg 301) “The fact that they’re called ‘extreme sports means, if you make a mistake, you die,”. It is undoubtable that fighting sports generate injuries among their practitioners but we could say that combats are not as “deadly” as some other sports that involve a high risk of death if something goes wrong. But not everything in extreme sports is bad. These activities also have their benefits. The article sets an example of an interviewee that lets their children practice skateboarding as a way to resolve

problems or let them go. MMA fighting might also help people with medical problems like rage attacks or sudden bursts of anxiety. To some people the practice of this sports just seems as a hobby or an activity to stay in shape, due to the fact that a great amount of stamina and strength is required to perform this sport, to some other might be some kind of therapy to help them canalize their anger or to help them relax through releasing anger or other type of feelings.

These type of sports are nowadays the only ones regulated by institutions associated with the government. It is the responsibility of these organizations to guarantee the safety of the competitors. They make sure the stage of the fight is properly suited to this kind of matches. As seen in the UFC Fighter safety video (Radio6PR, 2013) every time a fighter is going to have a combat the organizations make sure that they undergo a series of physical examinations to make sure they are in top condition and do not have any kind of complications or illness. Medical test include MRI, ophthalmological test, sports physical are the main medical taste that are made before each fight to ensure that the combatants are in top shape. The medical examinations are given by doctors chosen by the organization and they are obligated to report the results without favoritism to ensure the safety of the contestants. The organizations take care of every detail about the fight and also decide if the combatant is in condition to fight based on the results of the medical exams. Besides the medical regulations, the arena where the matches are held is the appropriate for this kind of combat. Referring to the video, the fighting arena is called “The Octagon” and is specially design for this kind of fights. The octagon is design to keep the fighters away from the public as well as to prevent the combatants from falling out of the ring. Specially designed materials are used to avoid any type of injuries like cuts or scratches. This helps the fighter to not be preoccupied in injuring themselves with any exterior agents that might intervene in the fight. The arena has to strong enough to contain the fighters within the octagon.

This also helps the referee to maintain control of the closed environment of the fight and enables him to stop or intervene in the fight whenever he sees it necessary. That is why in the video it is stated that “the cage is the safest environment for the fighters”. The video also states that within a record of 16000 fights in a period of 10 years, no fighter has been reported dead or seriously injured while competing.

According to Buse (2006) in his article “No Holds Barred Sport Fighting: A 10 Year Review of Mixed Martial Arts Competition”, he states that most of the matches taken in consideration were stopped due to injuries related to head trauma. This fact is of great importance because it could lead to serious injuries. This is the result he obtained, but he only looked at the injuries separately. If we compare the number of matches stopped due to head trauma and compare it to the total number of matches reviewed we can note that is not the majority. Many matches were stopped due to other reasons like disqualification; in fact, matches might be stopped without any injuries at all or some where stopped because of the time limit was reached. In these type of matches many tactics or different styles of fighting may be used. One of these style is called Jiu Jitsu. This style based on subduing the enemy through grappling or different body locks like arm, neck or leg locks. This style increases the chances of ending a match without injuries or an early stop.

As stated by the New York Times article “The Fight Club Generation” (Quenqua, 2012) this type of fighting has been gaining more and more popularity with time, it has become one of the most popular sports around the world. MMA fights are gaining so much popularity that are replacing boxing as the number one fighting sport. Maybe because in mixed martial arts there are different types of fighting styles that can be used, and in boxing just one. Mixed martial arts

fights are more popular within the young populations because they think that is a more complete for or a “real fight”. Additionally, mixed martial arts combat has gained even more popularity because big companies have shown support to the sport. Popular television channels like Fox Sports or MTV have been great supporters of the sport by dedicating special time to televise big MMA matches or shows related to mixed martial arts like Caged. Also mixed martial arts fights seem to be more active or lively compared to boxing matches. Many people do not know what they are about so they are just scared. It also mentions that in New York this type of fights are illegal but are in the process of being legalized. In the beginning in the majority of the states these fights were illegal, these times are called the dark years, but thanks to the support of the people and some legal paperwork, the sports, has been legalized. Regarding to the article, in these early times television networks did not think it was a good idea to televise these act of violence. For the fanatics the prohibition served as an igniter to increase the popularity of mixed martial arts fights, and internet was the medium that served to propagate this fanaticism.



Figure 2. "Extreme sports" (Clemmit, 2009, pg 300). Figure 2 shows a map of the US and indicates the states where professional or amateur MMA fights are illegal or legal.

After reviewing the information presented above it can be proven that mixed martial arts fights have evolved properly into a complete sport that assures the safety of the competitor. Mixed martial arts fights might be violent but they also have their benefits. They are not an act of mere violence. Even though MMA fights seem to be very dangerous some other extreme sports are proven to be more deadly because, if a mistake is committed, it would result in the death of the practitioner. Society's support has proven that mixed martial arts are being accepted around the globe and that it has evolved into a complete professional sport. The contrast between ancient times, beginnings of the sport and the present time, give proof of the changes that MMA fights have undergone through time. Even though it might be illegal in some states, society has demonstrated that the fights are seen as a professional sport that not anybody can practice. It requires a high level of practice, knowledge and courage to practice this sport. It is due to this acceptance that the popularity of this sport has rocketed to be one of the most viewed sports across the country. Many might not agree but nowadays these type of fights are seen just as any other sport and that's why MMA fights are in one of the most watched sports in the world.

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