

A faded, light gray background image of two mixed martial arts fighters in a cage. One fighter is in a defensive stance, while the other is on the ground, possibly after a takedown.

ICO MIXED MARTIAL ARTS UNIFIED RULES FOR AMATEUR COMPETITION



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ICO MIXED MARTIAL ARTS UNIFIED RULES FOR AMATEUR COMPETITION

[As of January 2026]

1) SCOPE:

Amateur Mixed Martial Arts [MMA] competition shall provide participants new to the sport of MMA the needed experience required to progress through to a possible career within the sport.

The sole ethos of Amateur MMA is to provide the safest possible environment for combatants to train and gain the required experience and knowledge under directed pathways allowing them to compete under the confines of the rules set out within this document.

It is recognized, through the International Combat Organisation (ICO) that varying country legislation may differ from region to region and this can be reflected in the resultant documentation and rules sets from the member countries.

The annual ICO MMA World Amateur Championships may be held in differing countries and as such changes shall be facilitated and known prior to competition. What we are striving for in conjunction with the unparalleled safety conscious nature of the combatants is a unified and an aesthetically common identity of the sport of Mixed Martial Arts for amateur competition.



2) DEFINITION:

“Mixed martial arts” means a combat competition involving the use, subject to any applicable limitations set forth in these Unified Rules, of a combination of techniques from different disciplines of the martial arts, including, without limitation, grappling, kicking and striking.

3) JURISDICTION:

The Referee shall remain the sole arbiter of a contest. All contests and exhibitions of mixed martial arts must be conducted under the supervision and authority of the commission/host regulatory body.

4) ROUNDS:

Each contest under ICO regulation shall be 3 [three] rounds each to be 3 [three] minutes in duration, with a rest period of 1 [one] minute between each round.

5) STOPPING THE CONTEST:

The referee and the ringside physician are the only individuals authorized to enter the ring/competition area at any time during competition, and the referee is the sole arbiter of a contest and is the only individual authorized to stop a contest.

6) JUDGING:

All contests will be evaluated and scored by three judges.

7) TEN (10) POINT MUST SYSTEM:

The 10-Point Must System will be the standard system of scoring a contest.

8) WARNINGS:

A single warning will be issued for the following infractions only:

- 1) Holding or grabbing fence
- 2) Holding onto opponent's shorts, gloves, shin-guards or rash-guard
- 3) Having the fingers outstretched, palm parallel to the floor toward opponent face

9) FOULS:

The following acts constitute a foul in mixed martial arts competition:

1. Butting with the head
2. Eye gouging of any kind
3. Biting or spitting at an opponent
4. Fish Hooking
5. Hair pulling
6. Spiking the opponent to the canvas onto the head or neck (pile-driving)
7. Strikes to the spine or the back of the head. The spine includes the tailbone
8. Throat strikes of any kind and/or grabbing the trachea

9. Fingers outstretched toward an opponent's face/eyes
10. Downward pointing elbow strike (12 to 6)
11. Groin attacks of any kind
12. Kneeing and/or Kicking the head of a grounded opponent
13. Stomping of a grounded competitor
14. Holding opponent's gloves, shorts, shin-guards or rash guards
15. Holding or grabbing the fence with fingers or toes
16. Small joint manipulation [fingers or toes]
17. Throwing an opponent out of the competition area
18. Intentionally placing a finger into any orifice, or into and cut or laceration of your opponent
19. Clawing, pinching, twisting the flesh
20. Timidity (avoiding contact, or consistently dropping the mouthpiece, or faking an injury
21. Use of abusive language in the competition area
22. Flagrant disregard of the referee's instructions
23. Unsportsmanlike conduct that causes an injury to opponent
24. Attacking an opponent after the bell has sounded the end of the period of unarmed combat.
25. Attacking an opponent on or during the break
26. Attacking an opponent who is under the care of the referee
27. Interference from a mixed martial artist's corner or seconds
28. Applying any foreign substance to the head or body in order to gain an advantage

10) FORBIDDEN TECHNIQUES

In addition to the listed fouls above, techniques that shall remain forbidden in Amateur Mixed Martial Arts contests shall be:

- 1) Elbow and forearm strikes of any kind
- 2) Heel Hook
- 3) Twister, neck crank, can opener, sit through crucifix and/or any submission deemed as applying pressure to the neck or spine
- 4) Knees to the head of an opponent
- 5) Linear and oblique kicks
- 6) Striking to joints

11) FOUL PROCEDURE

Disqualification can occur after any combination of fouls or after a single flagrant foul.

Fouls resulting in a point[s] being deducted and as signalled by the referee must result in the deduction from the offending competitor's score and is to be notated by all three judges and official scorekeeper.

Only a referee can assess a foul, if the referee does not call the foul then judges must not make that assessment on their own.

A fouled competitor has up to five minutes to recuperate. This is not applicable to all fouls.

If a foul is committed the referee may call time should the fouled competitor show any visible sign of distraction or injury.

- 1) The referee shall call time

2) The referee shall check the fouled competitor's condition and safety

3) The referee shall then instruct the fouling competitor to a neutral corner, assess the foul to the fouled competitor, deduct points [if required] and notify the judges and official scorekeeper.

If a bottom competitor commits a foul, unless the top competitor is injured, the contest will continue without referee intervention.

1) The referee will verbally notify the bottom competitor of the foul.

2) When the round is over, the referee will assess the foul and notify both corners, the judges and the official scorekeeper.

12) INJURIES SUSTAINED BY FAIR BLOWS AND FOULS:

Fair Blows: If injury is severe enough to terminate a contest, the injured competitor loses by TKO

Fouls: Intentional

1) If an injury is severe enough to cause the immediate termination of a contest, the competitor causing the injury loses by disqualification.

2) If an injury is produced and the contest is allowed to continue, the referee will notify the authorities and automatically deduct 2 points from the competitor who committed the foul. Point deductions for intentional fouls will be mandatory.

3) If an injury as described in above is the cause of the contest being stopped in a later round, the injured boxer will win by TECHNICAL DECISION, if he is ahead on the scorecards.

4) If an injury as described in above is the cause of the contest being stopped in a later round, the contest will result in a

TECHNICAL DRAW, if the injured competitor is behind or even on the scorecards.

5) If a competitor injures himself while attempting to foul his opponent, the referee will not take any action in his favour, and the injury will be the same as one produced by a fair blow.

Accidental

1) Any injury severe enough for the referee to stop the contest immediately, will result in a NO CONTEST if stopped before two rounds have been completed in a three round contest or if stopped before three rounds have been completed in a five round contest.

2) Any injury severe enough for the referee to stop the contest immediately after two rounds of a three round contest, or after three rounds of a five round contest have occurred, the contest

will result in a TECHNICAL DECISION, awarded to the competitor who is ahead on the score cards at the time the contest is stopped.

3) If injury above occurs, there will be no scoring of an incomplete round.

4) If injury above occurs, and the referee penalizes either competitor, then point(s) shall be deducted from the final score.

13) WEIGHT DIVISIONS:

Except with the approval of the commission/host regulatory authority the weight classes for mixed martial arts contests shall be (kg):

- Strawweight: under 52.2 kg

- Flyweight: over 52.2 kg to 56.7 kg
- Bantamweight: over 56.7 kg to 61.2 kg
- Featherweight: over 61.2 kg to 65.8 kg
- Lightweight: over 65.8 kg to 70.3 kg
- Welterweight: over 70.3 kg to 77.1 kg
- Middleweight: over 77.1 kg to 83.9 kg
- Light Heavyweight: over 83.9 kg to 93.0 kg
- Heavyweight: over 93.0 kg to 120.2 kg
- Super Heavyweight: over 120.2 kg

Weigh-ins for amateur competitors shall be on the day of competition, and each subsequent day of competition that a competitor progresses.

14) MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR COMPETITORS:

All competitors are required to complete all pre competition medical examinations and tests as set out by the commission/host regulatory authority. This can be found in the competition license and registration handbook or the statutes as defined by the ICO. The medical requirements set out pre competition shall be mandatory. The commission/host regulatory authority licensing the contest shall conduct or supervise all pre-contest weigh-ins and supervise a rules meeting for all competitors and their cornermen.

Post-Contest medical examination:

1) Immediately following a contest, each competitor shall be given a medical examination by a physician approved by the



commission/host regulatory authority. The medical examination may include any examinations or tests the commission deems necessary to determine the post-contest physical fitness of a competitor.

2) Any competitor who refuses to undergo a post-contest medical examination shall be immediately suspended for an indefinite period for an investigation to take place.

15) ICO EQUIPMENT SECTION

Competitors participating in ICO official events should comply with the ICO

regulations. National federations of the competing athletes are responsible for ensuring that competitors are wearing ICO Approved kit that comply with the rules.

In ICO tournaments, it is a mandatory requirement under ICO competition for all ICO Approved equipment to be worn at all times during competition. Competitors will be issued two sets of kit; one in red and one blue, with each set consisting of the

following items: gloves, shin guards, rash guard, and a pair of shorts.

Competitors will retain both sets of kit at the end of the competition.

Protective Kit

Gloves

The gloves shall be new for all events and in good condition or they must be replaced. Only gloves supplied

by the commission/host regulatory authority with prior approval from the ICO Technical Committee can be used for the duration of the competition. All competitors shall wear gloves with protective padding weighing a minimum of no less than 6 ounces and no more than 8 ounces.

The gloves for amateur competition shall be recognised as visibly different to those used under professional rules and be visually distinguishable from professional gloves. A Competitors are not permitted to supply their own gloves.

Gloves are to be open handed with finger and thumb loops to facilitate grappling. The wrist shall be supported by means of a Velcro strap. No laces up gloves are permitted. Gloves shall be coloured either Red or Blue.

Shin guards

The use of shin guards and rash guards shall be a mandatory requirement for amateur mixed martial arts competition. The type of shin guard used shall be able to facilitate the grappling aspects associated with competition. As such the preferred type shall be a tight competition pull-on sock/neoprene type shin guard. The use of shin guards with Velcro type strap fasteners or utilizing any substance other than which the shin guard is made of shall be forbidden. Shin guards shall be coloured either Red or Blue.

Groin Protectors

All male competitors must provide and wear a groin protector. Females may choose to wear a groin protector should they so wish.

Mouthpieces

All competitors are required to wear a well-fitting mouthpiece, which shall be subject to examination and approval. A round will not begin until both competitors have their respective mouthpieces in place.



If a mouthpiece is involuntarily dislodged during competition, the referee will call time and replace the mouthpiece at the first opportune moment, which does not interfere with the immediate action. Competitors are responsible for sourcing their own non-branded mouth guards.

Competitor's Apparel

Shorts

Each competitor must wear mixed martial arts shorts/compression shorts. No pockets, zips, fasteners or any foreign substance other than that of the material that the shorts are made of shall be permitted to present on the shorts. No external lace up waistband on the outside of the shorts are permitted, it must be inside the waist band of the shorts. The shorts shall be coloured either Red or Blue.

Rash guards

The type of rash guard to be used shall be of tight competition stretch material.

The rash guard will carry three letter country codes and the surname of the competitor on the upper back of the garment in tournaments where back numbers are applicable. All rash guards are to be of short sleeve type. No long sleeve rash guards are permitted. The rash guards shall be coloured either Red or Blue.

Special Considerations

ICO understands and gives special dispensation to all cultural and religious belief and practice. Any female competitor wishing to wear either/or long sleeve rash guards and tights to cover the skin can do so with prior written notification to the commission/host regulatory authority.

Shoes

Competitors may not wear shoes of any kind during competition.

Equipment Control procedure

Competitor's equipment/kit must be exempt from stains and must not show any signs of being worn out. If the condition of the equipment is assessed as unsatisfactory, the competitor must obtain replacement equipment from the Equipment Room. Replacements will only be issued in the following cases:

- Torn Equipment
- Bloodstains or any other apparent stains
- Worn out
- Lost or stolen kit (at discretion of the Equipment Manager)

The surname of the competitor on the accreditation card has to correspond with the surname on the back number.

Long hair must be tied up out of the way.

World Champion Competitors

At the ICO World Championships ICO will issue gold kit to previous competitors who are gold medallists under ALL of the following conditions:

- Competitor is a Gold medallist from any tournament since the last World championships including the previous year's Worlds tournament
- Competitor is competing in the same weight category as when they won gold
- Competitor is competing at the same level of competition (e.g., seniors' tournament). The gold kit is not compulsory and can be swapped for the red/blue kit if preferred at the Equipment Manager's discretion.



Note:

In the instance that both competitors in the bout are in gold it; one or both competitors will be issued with the red/blue protective kit for the bout as per the corner specified for the competitor on the bout card.

If the gold kit is not available, the competitor will be defaulted to blue/red as per the corner specified for the competitor on the bout card.

16) COMPETITION AREA REQUIREMENTS

Where possible and it is practically reasonable organisations should be using the ICO Approved Competition Area.

In all other instances where the ICO approved competition area is not used the following specification for the competition areas should be strictly followed. Close & detailed competition area inspections should take place before the start of ICO competitions and each subsequent day of competition to ensure the highest of safety standards.

Competition Area:

1) The competition area must be circular, or may form another shape such as square ring, hexagonal or octagonal and have equal

sides and must be no smaller than 20 feet x 20 feet and no larger than 32 feet x 32 feet in diameter/cross section. The competition area floor shall be padded in a manner as approved by the commission/host regulatory authority with at least a 40mm layer of high-density foam padding. Padding shall extend beyond the ring/competition area and over the edge of the platform. The ring/competition area shall have a vinyl

covering. Canvas covers are not permitted unless for a single day competition or final.

2) Boxing style rings must have 40mm protective flooring with 5 ropes or 4 reinforced ropes. External supervisors must be identifiable and given access to the external perimeter area of the ring. The ring and surrounding areas must be checked and inspected by the referee and supervisors.

Fence:

1) The canvas/vinyl floor covering of the competition area shall be enclosed by a fence made of such material as will not allow a competitor to fall out or break through it onto the floor or spectators, including, without limitation, chain-link fence coated with vinyl. Any metal portion of the fenced area must be covered and padded in a manner approved by the and must n commission/host regulatory authority and must not be abrasive to the competitors.

2) The fenced area must have 2 gated entrances [which must open outward] preferably on opposite sides of the fenced area.

3) There must not be any obstruction on any part of the fence surrounding the area in which the competitors are competing.

Ring Stools:

1) A ring stool of a type approved by the commission/host regulatory authority must be available for each competition area in use and for both red and blue corners. All ring stools must be thoroughly cleaned or replaced [if damaged/mislaid] after each

contest. 2) An appropriate number of stools or chairs shall be available for each competitor's seconds in the corner.

Other Equipment:

For each contest, the licensed promoter shall provide each competitor's corner with:

- 1) A clean water bucket with clean towel
- 2) A clear plastic bottle containing water.

Only water in clear plastic bottles is to be always consumed by competitors during competition.

17) SAFETY REQUIREMENTS:

Specifications for Bandages on Competitor's hands:

- 1) In all weight classes, the bandages on each competitor's hand shall be restricted to soft open weave gauze cloth not more than 20 yards in length and 2 inches in width, held in place by not more than 10 ft. of surgeon's/zinc oxide tape, 1 inch in width, for each hand.
- 2) Surgeon's/zinc oxide adhesive tape shall be placed directly on each hand for protection near the wrist. Strips of tape may be used between the fingers to hold down the bandages.
- 3) The bandages shall be evenly distributed across the hand.
- 4) Bandages and tape shall be placed on the competitor's hands in the dressing room in the presence of the commission/host regulatory authority.
- 5) Under no circumstances are gloves to be placed on the hands of a competitor until the approval of the commission/host regulatory authority is received. Each glove shall be sealed and taped either in red or blue. Competitors may not remove the gloves once sealed until the competition bout has taken place.

Competitor's Physical Appearance:

- 1) Each competitor must be clean and present a tidy appearance.

2) The use of Vaseline/grease or any other foreign substance, including, without limitation, grooming creams, lotions or sprays, may not be used on the face, hair or body of a competitor. The referee or the commission's representative shall cause any excessive grease or foreign substance to be removed.

3) The commission/host regulatory authority representative shall determine whether head or facial hair presents any hazard to the safety of the competitor or his opponent or will interfere with the supervision and conduct of the contest. If the head or facial hair of a competitor presents such a hazard or will interfere with the supervision and conduct of the contest, the competitor may not compete in the contest unless the circumstances creating the hazard or potential interference are corrected to the satisfaction of the commission's representation. Without limiting the foregoing standard, head hair must be trimmed or tied back in such a manner that it will not interfere with the vision of either competitor or cover any part of a competitor's face.

4) Competitors may not wear any jewellery or other piercing accessories while competing.

18) TYPES OF CONTEST RESULTS:

Submission by:

- 1) Physical Tap Out
- 2) Verbal Tap Out

Technical Knockout (TKO) by:

- 1) Referee Stopping the contest
- 2) Referee Stopping the contest on the advice of the Ringside Physician/Corner

Decision via the scorecards, including:

- 1) Unanimous Decision - When all three judges score the contest for the same competitor
- 2) Split Decision - When two judges score the contest for one competitor and one judge scores for the opponent
- 3) Majority Decision - When two judges score the contest for the same competitor and one judge scores a draw
- 4) Draw, including:
 - a) Unanimous Draw - When all three judges score the contest a draw
 - b) Majority Draw - When two judges score the contest a draw
 - c) Split Draw - When all three judges score differently
- 5) Disqualification
- 6) Forfeit
- 7) Technical Draw
- 8) Technical Decision
- 9) No Contest

In a tournament format where competitor progression and medal placing is needed, no contests and draws cannot be applied. In such instances if the three rounds of competition have resulted in a draw, then a fourth period/over time round shall be contested. In the event of a point deduction that results in a score draw in the overtime round then the competitor who committed the foul and had the point deduction shall be eliminated from the tournament, the opponent who did not commit the foul advances. This rule can only be applied to the fourth overtime round.

Only in a tournament format should overtime rounds be contested. At all other times the judge's evaluation and score remain final.

19) SCORING TECHNIQUES:

Effective Striking/Grappling shall be considered the priority of round assessments. Effective Aggressiveness should not be considered unless the judge does not see ANY advantage in the Effective Striking/Grappling realm. Cage/Ring Control should only be needed when all other criteria are 100% even for both competitors.

1) Effective Striking/Grappling

Legal blows that have immediate or cumulative impact with the potential to contribute towards the end of the match with the IMMEDIATE weighing in more heavily than the cumulative impact.

Successful execution of takedowns, submission attempts, reversals and the achievement of advantageous positions that produce immediate or cumulative impact with the potential to contribute to the end of the match weigh more heavily than the cumulative impact. It shall be noted that a successful takedown is not merely a changing of position, but the establishment of an attack from the use of the takedown.

Submission attempts that cause an opponent to tire and weaken, taking considerable effort to escape shall be given greater weight when scoring than those attempts that are easily defended and escaped without effort.

High amplitude and impactful throws and takedowns are weighed more heavily than competitors who are tripped or bundled to the mat.

This will be the deciding factor in a high majority of decisions when scoring a round. The next two criteria must be treated as a

backup and used only when Effective Striking/Grappling is 100% equal for the round.

2) Effective Aggressiveness

Aggressively making attempts to finish the competition. The key term is '*effective*'. Chasing after an opponent with no effective result or impact should not render in the judges' assessments

Effective Aggressiveness is only to be assessed if Effective Striking/Grappling is 100% equal for both competitors.

3) Competition Area Control

Competition area control is assessed by determining who is dictating the pace, place and position of the match.

Competition Area Control shall only to be assessed if Effective Striking/Grappling and Effective Aggressiveness is 100% equal for both competitors. This will be assessed very rarely.

Round scoring:

The 10-point system shall be utilized when scoring a competition.

10-10 Round

A 10 – 10 round in MMA is when both competitors have competed for whatever duration of time in the round and there is no difference or advantage between either competitor.”

A 10 – 10 round in MMA should be extremely rare and is not a score to be used as an excuse by a judge that cannot assess the differences in the round.

10-9 Round

A 10 – 9 Round in MMA is where one combatant wins the round by a close margin.

A 10 – 9 round in MMA is the most common score a judge assesses during the night. If, during the round, the judge sees a competitor land the better strikes, or utilize

effective grappling during the competition, *even if by just one technique* over their opponent, the judge shall give the winning competitor a score of 10 while assessing the losing competitor a score of 9 or less.

A score of 10 – 9 can reflect an extremely close round or a round of marginal domination and/or impact.

10–8 Round

A 10 – 8 Round in MMA is where one competitor wins the round by a large margin.

A score of 10 – 8 does not require a competitor to dominate their opponent for the entire three minutes of a round.

The score of 10 – 8 is utilized by the judge when the judge sees verifiable actions on the part of either competitor. Judges shall ALWAYS give a score of 10 – 8 when the judge has established that one competitor has dominated the action of the round, had duration of the domination and impacted their opponent with either effective strikes or effective grappling manoeuvres that have diminished the abilities of their opponent.

10–7 Round

A 10 – 7 Round in MMA is when a competitor completely overwhelms their opponent in Effective Striking and/or Grappling and stoppage is warranted.

A 10 – 7 round in MMA, namely amateur competition is a score that judges will rarely give.