

Association of Boxing Commissions

1/2 Point MMA Judging Committee

2011 Report

Washington DC Annual Conference

MMA Committee on Judging:

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Overview:

In July of 2010 at the Association of Boxing Commissions annual conference in New Orleans a committee was struck to examine MMA judging.

The purpose of this committee was to examine a proposal made by Nelson "Doc" Hamilton to the ABC on the use of the ½ point judging system for MMA.

Hamilton proposed a scoring system based on breaking the scoring down to half-points, where a close round, a solid win, a dominant win and having the opponent on the verge of defeat could all be differentiated.

Under this system, if a fighter wins a round that's difficult to call, it gets scored 10-9.5. When it's clear that one fighter won the round, it's 10-9. When a fighter dominates the round but doesn't have his opponent in bad shape during the round, or if a fighter does major damage but the opponent gets a degree of offense in, that would be a 10-8.5. A 10-8 round or lower would be similar to how things are scored today.

Under Hamilton's system, the referee would also be involved in calling catches or submission attempts during the course of the bout. There would also be a 4th judge implemented in the event of draws, which under the ½ point system would have a great likelihood of occurring.

Committee Objectives:

The goal of the committee was to explore Hamilton's system to determine if this system could be implemented by the majority of Athletic Commissions that make up the Association of Boxing Commissions membership and to see if this new MMA scoring system would be an improvement on the current 10 point system which most Commissions use today. A report would be submitted a year later at the next ABC annual meeting in Washington D.C.

The Committee met via conference calls several times with detailed agenda issues.

Stakeholder Questionnaire :

The committee decided to get input from select stakeholders (Promoters, sanctioning groups etc.) in the MMA industry regarding judging issues that were facing the industry.

The committee sent out email correspondence to these stakeholders and asked for their responses in a questionnaire. Some stakeholders responded while others did not.

*An attached questionnaire is included at the end of this report for ABC member perusal.

Committee ½ Point Evaluation:

Hamilton's model was viewed in its entirety and then broken down into components.

The committee identified two issues (see below) with respect to Hamilton's system which were potentially problematic if they were to be implemented.

The other issue which was identified by the committee was ensuring that the ½ point system was given a fair evaluation. The system as a whole had many components (referee involvement, 4th judge etc.), and by implementing all of those components the committee felt it would be difficult to identify which one or ones were responsible for the success or failure of the system.

In essence the committee felt that by testing one variable at a time versus multi-variable testing, this would allow a better evaluation and a more accurate measure of the results.

In summary, the committee discussed several of the key variables in Hamilton's model and identified which had the best chance of being implemented and adopted by Athletic Commissions and accepted in the industry as a whole.

The following are two components of the ½ point system which were discussed by the committee and were voted not to be implemented and the subsequent reasoning.

1. Referee being involved in calling catches / attempted submissions

The Committee unanimously voted against this option for the following reasons:

- a) The Referee's primary responsibility is for the safety of the fighters. By adding this additional role, the committee felt that this had the potential of affecting the referee's ability to stay focused on the task of administering the primary mandate, that is, fighter protection. As a general rule the more complex you make a task the greater the chance for failure.

- b) Many referees' still lack the skills to identify the techniques and positions found within MMA. As such the committee felt even if a referee was tasked with this mandate, many referees would still not be able to adequately perform this task, and would either miss catches or identify wrong catches altogether, further creating problems with the judging.

- c) The Committee acknowledged that some referees would have the skills and abilities to perform (a) and (b), however, the majority of officials would not be able to do so.

2. Table judge (4th judge) to be assigned to all MMA matches.

The Committee unanimously voted against this option for the following reasons:

- a) The Committee felt that having a 4th judge decide a contest based on different judging criteria might create additional problems, the point being that athletes are used to certain judging criteria and then are being judged on a different criteria to break the ties.

- b) The Committee felt that athletic commissions would not favor the implantation of a 4th judge when traditionally the 3 judge system has been used, and Commissions have designed much of their existing protocols on the 3 judge system.

- c) Currently athletic Commissions are having a difficult time finding qualified judges to fill the three positions, much less finding additional qualified personnel to fill this fourth spot.

Draws:

The committee identified the strong possibility that fights ending in a draw would be more common. The committee discussed this issue and came to no conclusions as to how this could or should be handled. Opinions varied as to whether having more draws would even be an issue.

It was ultimately decided that this issue would be left up to the ABC collective membership as a whole for a detailed discussion if this system were to be implemented.

Conclusion:

The committee felt that before any new system was to be implemented, that it would have to go through an extensive evaluation phase where the new system was used during the course of normal MMA events: For this to occur several Athletic Commissions would need to volunteer their services

and implement this system (or the adapted system - minus the referee involvement and table judge), into their existing judging model and Commission protocols.

The committee felt that this step would require detailed discussions with the entire ABC membership as many jurisdictions and legislations would be affected by the implementation of the new system. Additionally some promotions and athletes may be affected if they were used to field test the system.

The committee acknowledges that specific evaluation criteria would have to be developed and maintained so that Commissions could ensure that the system was in fact being evaluated in a consistent and fair manner, and not in a haphazard way.

As a result the committee has decided to present their findings at the ABC conference and discuss with the ABC membership the next direction (if any) that should be taken with the possible implementation of the ½ point system.

The committee may oversee and investigate the results of Athletic Commissions who volunteer for the evaluation phase as a possible option.

*Note: The ½ point system and evaluated is being used by CAMO in California.

Additional Comments:

The committee also acknowledged that some officials currently being used by Athletic Commissions do not have a strong understanding of MMA, and this has contributed to the issues and concerns of MMA judging. The committee recognizes that each jurisdiction is ultimately responsible for the hiring and training of their officials and can only make recommendations.

The Committee felt that whether the current 10 point system remains intact or the proposed ½ point system (or any variations thereof) is adopted that MMA officials are still lacking in an overall understanding of the sport. As one committee member stated *“the ½ point system will not make a bad judge a better judge.”*

There are currently several ABC recognized training programs on the market and many Athletic Commissions routinely conduct in house training to offset these ABC training programs. The committee felt this was a positive step in the right direction in improving the judging with MMA.

The committee felt that new individuals being hired as judges should receive adequate training and if possible receive both mentorship and experience from amateur events where they can hone their skills as a judge.

The Committee also felt that a more defined scoring system should be adopted with respect to judging, which would enhance MMA judges with respect to their decisions.

Special Acknowledgment:

The Committee acknowledges Nelson “Doc” Hamilton who has put together a detailed program in an effort to help the issues facing MMA judging, and who has been strong supporter of the MMA community.

***Attachments: MMA Stakeholder Questionnaire form:**

Questions:

1. Do you feel that there are issues with the current MMA judging system (the 10 point must system)? If so explain.
2. Has your organization been affected by what you perceive as substandard judging?
3. Do you agree with the recent media reports suggesting that the judging in MMA needs to be changed and/or improved? Explain
4. Are you familiar with the ½ point judging system being proposed?
5. Would you support a new judging system, such as the ½ point system which allows for a greater division of points to be given?

6. The committee has identified that the ½ point system may result in more bouts being decided as draws. Will this be an issue with your organization and if so can you recommend any solutions as a way of solving this issue.

7. Can you foresee any other problems if the ½ point judging system were to be implemented.

8. If the ½ point system were to be implemented would your organization be willing to cooperate and be used to trial test this system at some of your events.

9. Are there any comments or concerns specific to MMA judging that you would like to comment on which would help Commissions improve judging.