The Redefinition of Legitimate Violence in Combat Sports: The Case of MMA in the USA and Europe

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Abstract

This paper analyses and compares the differential development of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) as a legitimate combat sport in Europe and the USA through the figurational framework of established–outsider relations. In the USA, a relative degree of identification between fighters and the broader public has resulted in a wider acceptance of professional MMA. In Europe, conversely, the situation is more mixed, ranging from a relative rejection resulting in a more controlled amateur version within certain areas of the continent such as Germany, France and Scandinavia, but a relatively successful professional model in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Central European countries such as Poland. The distinctive paths followed by MMA on both sides of the Atlantic demonstrate different civilising patterns. These patterns imply different sensitivities towards violence and different power balances between social groups defining what constitutes legitimate institutional violence in the format of combat sports.

Keywords

MMA; established–outsider relations; moral panics; civilising offensives; USA; Europe

Introduction

This paper analyses and compares the differential development of Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) as a legitimate combat sport within specific European and USA civilising processes. It is argued that the socially accepted threshold of violence in MMA in European and US-American civilising processes unfolded within dynamic figurations featuring two basic groups: the established (the wider public and participants of established martial arts/combat sport disciplines) and the outsiders (participants in MMA). The paper also discusses the role of moral panics, civilising offensives and cosmetic changes in established–outsider relations within dynamic civilising–decivilising balances. The different figurational dynamics at work on both sides of the Atlantic underpin the distinctive development of MMA in the USA (towards a professional mainstream sport) in comparison to Europe (towards a more restricted professional model and an incipient amateur model).

MMA represents an amalgam of unarmed combat styles, blending standing striking techniques (from disciplines such as boxing, karate, kick-boxing, kung-fu, taekwondo, Thai-boxing, savate) with grappling techniques and fighting on the ground (from disciplines such as judo, Graeco-Roman wrestling, sambo or Brazilian jiu-jitsu). Modern MMA is the result of a long period of hybridisation between Eastern and Western fighting styles. This process gained momentum during the 1960s within the professional circuit of combat

sports, developing into a distinctive format in the 1990s (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010). The major landmark in the history of contemporary MMA as a combat sport came when the first Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC) was organised in the USA in 1993. From 1997 to 2007, the Japanese organisation Pride was also very successful and was subsequently bought by the UFC in 2007. This merger (and the buys of WEC in 2010 and Strikeforce in 2013) meant the UFC became the biggest and most influential MMA organisation in the world. Since 2019, ESPN holds the broadcasting rights of UFC and many of the top fights achieve over one million pay-per-view buys, with 2.4m individual sales for the Khabib Nurmagomedov vs Conor McGregor fight at UFC 229 in 2018, according to the specialised MMA site *Tapology* (*Tapology* 2020).

The situation on the other side of the Atlantic is not quite the same. Even though professional MMA has enjoyed relative success in the UK and Ireland, its development is clearly lagging when compared to the USA. This is even more evident in continental Europe where MMA is almost restricted to the amateur model rather than the professional one, resulting in a much slower take off. The contrast between the USA and Europe can be better understood when taking into account the development of MMA as a specific established–outsider figuration (Elias and Scotson 2008 [1965]) within different civilising processes. Whereas in the USA professional MMA (mainly UFC) went from an outsider – even banned – combat sport to the peak of mainstream combat sports, in Europe the predominant established groups articulated a rejection figuration (see 'A rejection figuration against MMA in Europe' below) that kept MMA in a more controversial outsider position.

This paper draws on relevant statistical information and interviews from specialists on MMA, and it uses documentary analysis of online documents as the main method of research. The main sources of empirical data are newspapers articles, specialised MMA websites, and the official webpage of the International MMA Federation (IMMAF). A word of caution needs to be introduced here. Some of the data analysed come mainly from pro-MMA media, making it potentially unreliable and biased. Thus, we have maintained some academic distance, avoiding taking the statistics or some statements at face value.

The first section of the article presents a general outline of the development of combat sports within the European and US civilising processes. It also discusses research on established–outsider relations, moral panics, and civilising offensives in relation to civilising processes and sport. The subsequent sections present the specific development of MMA within established–outsiders dynamics, first in USA and then in Europe. The last section presents the main findings and reflects on the future of MMA in relation to the Olympic movement within broader global processes.

Civilising processes and the shifting established–outsider relationships of professional and amateur combat sports in the USA and Europe

The analysis of martial arts/combat sports as a kind of 'institutionalised violence' poses interesting questions from the perspective of the long-term civilising patterns followed by different nations. [1][#N1] Differences in the format of these activities and in the level of acceptance among the public reveal the specificities of different civilising processes.

Considering the European (Elias [1939] 2012) [2][#N2] and US-American (Mennell 2007) civilising patterns, a clear difference stands out. The absence of a unified and centralised 'good society' in the US-American civilising process resulted in a relatively open competition between a variety of centres of power (Wouters 2007: 160) and a weaker monopoly of violence by the state (Mennell 2007: 154; Wouters 2020: 322 note 17,

327–328). The American civilising process unfolded within a more balanced power ratio between the state and the market, with a stronger role played by the latter in the shaping of the national habitus. According to Mennell '[the American habitus] is far less oriented to the state than to the market' (Mennell 2007: 104). This determinant feature of the US civilising process fostered a different threshold in relation to the acceptable use of violence in comparison to Europe, resulting in a higher acceptance of violence by US citizens (e.g., carrying arms) when compared to Europeans. These differences in civilising standards can be observed in the development of the kind of 'institutionalised violence' constituted by combat sports. [3] [#N3] As the market played a strong part in the broad set of US legitimate violence, professional combat sports (market-laden modality) played a stronger role than the amateur side (connected to public, state-bound institutions) in the USA when compared to Europe. [4] [#N4] The different degree of importance between amateur and professional models on opposite sides of the Atlantic speaks to the broader relations between established and outsider groups. In the specific case of MMA, the development of the sport unfolded within distinct European and USA dynamic figurations featuring two basic groups on a broad scale: established (general public and participants of legitimate martial arts /combat sports) and outsiders (participants of non-legitimate martial arts /combat sports).

Elias and Scotson (2008 [1965]) developed the analytical concept of established–outsider relations as a way to understand power relations between social groups, be it class, race/ethnicity, or gender. Established groups are characterised by 'greater social cohesion and long-standing integrated social networks, greater power, more control over flows of communication' (Liston 2005a: 26). Moreover, within this asymmetrical set of power relations, they have greater capacity to install a legitimate definition of outsider groups, often based on highly involved, fantasy-laden characterisation (Elias 2007: 159, 162) of outsiders. They thus normally tend to perceive outsiders as 'law breakers' or 'status violators' whose behaviour constitutes a threat to the 'social' or 'moral order', with all members of an outsider group seen in terms of belonging to 'the minority of the worst' (Elias and Scotson 2008 [1965]).

Several studies have employed the established–outsider framework within sport. For instance, Dunning and Waddington (2003) analysed the issue of 'drug use' in bodybuilding, demonstrating the negative stereotyping of bodybuilders (members of the outsider group) by members of their wider society (the established group), using a study by Monaghan (2001) as their basis. Liston (2005b) analysed the relationship between males and females in male-associated sports in Ireland, concluding that females (the outsider group) lacked the organisational resources and networks to shift the uneven balance of power between the sexes in a significant manner. The established, stereotypical view of females was accepted to a certain degree by females themselves. Similar conclusions were drawn in Velija's (2011) ethnographic study of girls' cricket teams, which demonstrated the existence of a division of power between female cricketers and a clear impact of established (male) perceptions affecting females' concern with their own self-image about social class and sexuality.

The shifting power balance between social groups oftentimes implies the emergence of moral panics and civilising offensives (Powell 2013), especially when established groups feel threatened by the rising power ratio of subordinate, outsider groups. Moral panic can be defined as an 'overreaction to a perceived social problem' (Rohloff 2019: 3), as occurred for instance in the case of 'football hooliganism' (Dunning, Murphy and Williams 1988) and rugby-related violence (Dunning and Sheard 2004) during the second half of the twentieth century in UK. Civilising offensives can be defined as 'the active, conscious, and deliberate civilizing projects of powerful groups' (van Krieken 1999: 303). Several recent studies consider the complex relationship of moral panics and civilising offensives within civilising and decivilising processes, for instance in the case of climate change (Rohloff 2019). Specifically related to sports, Flint and Powell (2009; 2011; 2013) analysed attempts by the Scottish government at eradicating sectarianism through campaigns in

spheres such as education and football. The eradication of sectarian behaviour at Scottish football matches became the target of a wider civilising offensive in relation to football spectatorship in general. Such a project was highly influenced by the oversized portrayal of the topic – a typical feature of moral panics – by the media.

Following the aforementioned studies, this paper uses the established–outsiders frame to analyse combat sports. According to Elias and Dunning (2008 [1986]), modern sports developed within a framework of broader civilising processes. Due to the 'sportisation process', in which pastimes become codified, standardised and increasingly regulated, a decrease of the level of violence and a greater demand for participants' self-control unfolded over time Elias and Dunning 2008 [1986]). Even though combat sports also underwent this civilising trend, they maintained an ambivalent relationship with populations whose daily life experience of violence progressively decreasing. These sports were perceived as dwelling on 'the margins of "real" and "mock" fighting, and thus on the margins of modern sport' (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010: 55). These activities have trouble in providing 'the playful mimetic tensions of leisure sport' (Elias 2008 [1986]: 26). Some spectators cannot detach themselves and thus see activities such as boxing or MMA as a real fight (violence) rather than a sport. On the contrary, participants in combat sports explicitly recognise the differences between the 'mock fights' for which they train and 'real fighting'. The latter term is reserved for unregulated combat such as street fighting. The work of Wacquant (1995) on the pugilistic habitus illustrated, among other things, the way in which violent practices are normalised by those who regularly participate in them, and how outsiders invariably have a heightened sensitivity towards, and condemn, such practices. Though not necessarily apparent to the viewing public, testimony from contemporary participants suggests that modern forms of combat are characterised by an instrumental, rather than affective, use of violence (Dunning 2008 [1986]) and thus by relatively high levels of self-control. In addition to Wacquant's (1995) boxing case study, MMA is treated by Spencer (2013) and Staack (2019), with further martial arts/combat sports discussed by Sánchez García and Spencer (2013).

Due to the long-term, gradual development of 'civilising sensitivities' in Western societies, fighters [5][#N5] (especially in professional combat sports) have become increasingly less able to impose the view of their activities from within. Fighters are relegated to the outsider group in terms of the definition of legitimate uses of violence in sport. The general public acts to set the adequate threshold of violence in society. Oftentimes, public administration and professional groups such as physicians speak on behalf of the general public, articulating civilising offensives. The movement to ban boxing, promoted strongly by the British Medical Association during the 1980s is a noticeable recent example (Sheard 1998). The situation in martial arts and combat sports differs in matters of public opinion in Western countries. As Vertonghen et al. (2014: 656) have remarked, a 'dichotomization often exists between the "good" and the "bad" in the public opinion'. On one side, amateur martial arts (e.g., karate, taekwondo, aikido) are considered as good and as having positive educational value. On the other side, combat sports (e.g., boxing, kickboxing, muay-thai, MMA) are considered as bad and more linked to aggression, violence and health-compromising behaviour. Such a dichotomy not only exists for the general public in the West but also for the participants in such activities: martial artists tend to identify combat sports – especially the professional disciplines – with coarse manifestations of fighting. Martial artists also try to present their activity in opposition to (professional) combat sports as a way of complying with the acceptable threshold of violence in society (see Sánchez García 2006 for a comparison of boxing and aikido).

Tracing the figurational dynamics of MMA through the lens of established–outsider relations spotlights different and specific trends in the US and European cases. The analysis of such dynamics can shed light on the fact that while MMA in the USA gained a great ascendance, it remained relatively underdeveloped in

Europe (especially on a professional level). The following sections analyse the specific development of MMA on both sides of the Atlantic.

A changing figuration in UFC: from banned sport to mainstream phenomenon in USA

The presentation of UFC 1 in 1993 by the Semaphore Entertainment Group (SEG) shook the world of combat sports. The original idea came from jiu-jitsu expert Rorion Gracie, who had been actively teaching martial arts around Southern California during the 1980s. The Gracie family had extensive experience in *vale tudo* (a Portuguese term for no-holds-barred bouts) since the first half of the twentieth century in Brazil. Rorion thought the best way to publicise his discipline would be to organise a competition to test which combat style was best. Victory was only by knockout, submission or abandonment, with no weight categories, no time limit, and only strikes to the crotch and throat and eye-gouging forbidden. The format was thus considered by hardcore participants as the real test of skills in the 'the Octagon' (the UFC's customary 'ring'), which was initially dominated by Rorion's brother Royce Gracie through his unbeatable jiu-jitsu ground work.

The UFC also ignited moral panics that fuelled a rejection movement against the activity, leading to a banning campaign. The most famous spokesperson for this movement was Senator John McCain, who defined MMA as 'human cockfighting' in a letter to the fifty state governors in 1996 and was successful in achieving the ban of MMA from pay-per-view in 1997.

In 2001, Zuffa Sports Promotion bought an almost extinct UFC organisation and infused it with new life. Weight categories, time limits, rounds, and 31 new rules discerning legal from illegal actions were introduced. For instance, head butting, elbow strikes to the back of the head/neck and kicking a downed fighter to the head were outlawed. Also, some 'cosmetic changes' (Sheard 1997; Sánchez García 2019), such as the introduction of small mittens avoiding the use of bare-knuckles, helped the activity to gain legitimacy. Sheard (1997) used the concept of 'cosmetic changes' to discuss the civilising pattern of boxing. He noted that people's thresholds of tolerance to violence could be modified not simply through 'real' limitations on violence, but also through 'cosmetic changes', such as the use of headguards. The paradox is that such innovations may unintentionally fail to reduce danger to participants (e.g., brain damage), but in being seen to reduce more visible dangers (e.g. cuts) shift the parameters of acceptability by pushing the more visible manifestations of violence 'behind the scenes' (Murphy and Sheard 2008). The notion of cosmetic changes adds another layer of complexity to the topic of moral panics within civilising processes: measures to make the activity safer blend with measures to make the activity 'apparently' safer and more palatable for social standards of violence, thus preventing or diminishing moral panic reactions. In 2001, these rules were officially sanctioned by the Athletic Commission of the State of Nevada. The UFC was transformed into a more conventional, respectable format of combat sports, regaining rights to organise events and television broadcasting.

In 2005, the launch of a television reality show called The Ultimate Fighter (TUF), featuring UFC champions coaching potential fighters, represented a turning point in the development of the fighting promotion into the mainstream. The finale, broadcast nationally for free on the cable channel Spike TV, included a thrilling, agonistic battle between Forrest Griffin and Stephan Bonnar, mainly centred around standing striking and with some presence of blood in the octagon. TUF 1 had a major impact on the expansion of the UFC (Kim et al. 2008: 116). It is not surprising, then, that by 2006 UFC television events were drawing better cable ratings in key demographics than NBA, NHL, and MLB games, [6] [#N6] and MMA established the pay-per-view

industry's new single-season record by generating more than $200 million in 2006 in the USA (Kim, Andrew and Greenwell 2009: 53).

The Ultimate Fighter fostered general audiences' identification with fighters, diminishing the potential for the re-emergence of moral panics and movements to ban MMA. The reality show demonstrated the humane face of the fighters – ordinary guys, hanging around, training, having fun, creating an empathetic identification for audiences. It opened a way to facilitate a confluence between the habitus [7] [#N7] of fighters and audiences – in regard to acceptable thresholds of violence in combat sports – to come much closer. The recognition of the UFC as a legitimate sport by fans

> may be attributed to the success of the 'Ultimate Fighter' reality television series [...]. 'The Ultimate Fighter' series not only generated awareness for MMA but educated potential consumers about the rules, athletes, and culture associated with the sport (Kim et al. 2008: 116).

Nonetheless, the importance of The Ultimate Fighter was not only that it expanded the appeal of the UFC to the general public. It also established a new way of marketing MMA in the media through the 'spectacularisation of violence' (Sánchez García 2019b; 2020). The term refers to the strategies aimed at 'selling the risk of '"violent appearances" without the undesired consequences of excessive damage' (Sánchez García, 2019b: 80). An optimal equilibrium between 'cosmetic changes' and the 'spectacularisation of violence' was/is crucial to for the maintenance of an adequate tension-balance in MMA and contemporary bare-knuckle fighting in the USA. Both 'cosmetic changes' and 'spectacularisation of violence' speak about the complex relationship between appearances and danger within civilising/decivilising patterns (see below). The introduction of 'spectacular violence' reinforced the framing of the activity within a theatrical setting (Stenius 2011), emphasising the striking aspect of the sport – as opposed to grappling – in order to add some blood to the dramatic energy of the spectacle. According to Hutchinson et al.'s (2014: 1355) study of UFC from 2006 to 2012, 85 percent of the knockouts were due to punches. Hackett and Storey (2017: 15) concluded that strikers represented the most prominent category among UFC champions at their time of writing. Due to the predominance of this restricted striking style, unintended side-effects such as less knockouts and more decisions as a way of determining winners took place (*Fightmetrics*, pers. comm., 21 March 2017). The other unintended side-effect of this striking predominant trend was more blood in the octagon. Nevertheless, blood did not generate a moral panic reaction this time (Sánchez García 2019b: 81–82), nor was it a crucial factor in attracting audiences (Kim et al. 2008: 116). Blood was experienced by connoisseur commentators and fans in a more detached way as part of an intense combat sport.

Three notable factors were central to MMA's becoming accepted as a mainstream, established combat sport in the USA. First, the participation of big sponsors such as Bud Light in 2008, or the $70 million deal in 2015 that allowed Reebok to be the exclusive outfitter of the UFC. Second, growing media coverage and support. In 2011 the UFC signed a seven-year broadcasting agreement with the FOX Sports Media Group and MMA events were also covered by ESPN and *Sports Illustrated*. The UFC presence in the media has become so big as to become the most watched sport among US-American audiences between 17 and 35 (Brent and Kraska 2013: 357). According to Dave Meltzer (2017), an American journalist who represents a reliable source for UFC statistics: 'It's been roughly 11 years since the UFC was able to hang with boxing, and eventually surpass boxing (except for rare superfights) as a consistent pay-per-view draw'. Third, the spread of MMA to the US middle classes, both as spectators and direct participants has been key to its growth and development. The research on American MMA spectators' motives by Kim et al. (2008: 113) found that 'two-thirds of the audience had some education beyond high school and half of the audience reported incomes over $50,000, which contradicts critics' claims that the sport only attracts lower-class spectators'. Abramson and

Modzelewski (2011: 169) demonstrate how MMA for middle class practitioners is not (mainly) a career path but a meaningful activity as 'they feel it gives them visceral access to widespread American ideals, such as being rewarded for hard work, "being true to oneself," and forming voluntary communities'.

Thus, the situation during the 2000s became far different from the 'banned era' of the 1990s, as the analysis of public officials' discourse in US mass media clearly shows. According to Santos et al. (2013), narratives of MMA as a savage competition – such as 'more like dog and cockfights than boxing or other sports' (*USA Today*, 30 November 1995) and as an 'animalistic and destructive form of human cockfighting' (*New York Times*, 18 November 1995) – gave way to narratives of fair and orderly competition, such as 'the worst harm is orthopaedic, not neurological, as it is in boxing' (*New York Times*, 7 March 2010), and 'showcases fair and disciplined bona-fide athletic competition' (*USA Today*, 26 March 2010). In fact, the former spokesperson of the movement to ban MMA, Senator McCain, contributed funding to The Cleveland Clinic's Fighter Brain Health Study in 2014, declaring he would give MMA a go if he were younger. At the press conference he declared: 'If we don't do this, then I'm afraid that support for this incredible entertaining sport [MMA] will wane on the part of the American people' (Filloy 2014).

A rejection figuration against MMA in Europe

On 22 April 1999, a recommendation by the Council of Europe advised the prohibition of free fighting contests such as cage fighting. Recommendation No. R (99) 11 related the matter to the 'Convention for the Protection of Human Rights' and 'Fundamental Freedoms' and the 'European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour at Sports Events', clearly expressing why such violent behaviours should be outlawed. The recommendation contained the following sequential statements:

> Concerned by the growth of the phenomenon of so-called 'sporting' violence as entertainment, as for example in the case of free fights;
>
> Noting that cage fighting is wrongly promoted by its instigators as a sport or as one of the martial arts, but that, in reality, unlike sport and the martial arts, it is not governed by proper rules;
>
> Considering that fighting contests such as cage fighting cannot be regarded as a sport and that it constitutes a danger to spectators, jeopardises the health of the contestants and has connections with unlawful activities, particularly gambling;
>
> Considering that violence and barbarous and savage acts perpetrated in the name of sport have no social value in a civilised society which respects human rights,
>
> [The committee of ministers] Recommends that governments of the member States undertake all necessary measures to prohibit and prevent free fighting contests such as cage fighting (Recommendation no. R (99) §11, Council of Europe 2000: 385)

The first official bout in Europe, the 'Cage Fight Tournament', had taken place in Belgium in 1995 and, whilst not successful in itself, stimulated sufficient Dutch interest to lead to the subsequent establishment of the 'Free Fight Event' in Amsterdam and '2hot2handle' in Rotterdam. Other MMA promotions developed around Europe during the 1990s. These kinds of bouts were still developed 'behind the scenes' and were publicised based on spectacular features such as blood, no rules and ultra-violence. It is not surprising then that van

Bottenburg and Heilbron's (2006) survey of spectators (predominantly working-class males) at the second 'Free Fight Gala' in Amsterdam found that casual fans attending this event were more likely to be attracted to MMA due to its violence when compared to those who were themselves direct participants.

The European fighting promotions were mainly imitating the US format of the UFC that had started in 1993. As a parallel development, the Council of Europe recommendation was equivalent to Senator McCain's campaign against UFC in the USA in 1997. Thus, the first phase of MMA development on both sides of the Atlantic was very similar. Nonetheless, whereas in the USA a change in the format and rules of the sport brought about its professional take off, in continental Europe, despite the fact that the same changes were also introduced, MMA was confronted with a more sustained rejection figuration involving three interrelated established groups.

1. Public administrations from the European to national levels of government.

On 25–26 April 2017, the Council of Europe hearing on cage-fighting took place in Paris. The hearing had followed a review of the Council of Europe's 1999 recommendation prohibiting 'free fighting'/'cage-fighting' (Recommendation no. R (99) §11, published in Council of Europe 2000: 384–385) initiated by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) in May 2016. The result was that neither the review nor the hearing brought about much of a change in relation to the 1999 recommendation, preventing the advance of MMA's official recognition as a professional sport by EU public governing bodies.

On a national level, the rejection took shape in different forms in Europe. For instance, MMA was banned from German television from 2010 to 2015 by the Bavarian State Media Authority, after the unusually bloody fight between Stefan Struve and Denis Stojnić at UFC 99 in Cologne in 2009, the first UFC in 'mainland' Europe. The prohibition brought the professional development of MMA bouts to a halt in Germany. The rejection figuration was also very visible in France during this period (Delalandre and Collinet 2012; Collinet et al. 2013). On 19 September 2015, an MMA tournament called 'Cage Encounter 4' was organised in Paris and the official reaction was overwhelming: on the day of the event, two police raids took place at the Cirque d'Hiver and, even though the bout was not banned, the Secretary of State for Sport, Thierry Braillard, promised an investigation and sanctions (Raynal 2015). In 2016, a ministerial decree updated new conditions for organising public demonstrations of combat sports in France (Ministère de la Ville, de la Jeunesse et des Sports 2016). Despite the fact that any explicit reference to MMA was absent, the decree prohibited activities allowing blows to the opponent when on the ground, the use of elbows, and insisted contests be fought on a carpet or inside a ring. Moreover, sanctioned events needed to be affiliated to a sports federation recognised by the French state (Gendron 2016). This has led to a paradoxical situation where professional MMA bouts are prohibited, whilst training for the sport is permitted. Thus, some renowned French MMA fighters can be seen in UFC promotions but cannot fight in their country of origin.

Apart from France, Norway and Iceland – two countries with a consistent tradition of banning professional combat sports such as boxing – have represented true strongholds opposing MMA in recent times. Whereas Iceland still maintains the ban, the Norwegian MMA Federation (NMMAF) confirmed recognition for Amateur MMA under the Norwegian Sports Federation in April 2019 (Curran 2019). This situation can be compared to the long ban on pro boxing in Norway (1982–2016), during which fighters like world champion Cecilia Brækhus could not fight in their own country as a result. [8] [#N8]

2. Amateur martial arts/combat sports

In Europe, the associative amateur model, heir of Coubertin Olympism, has remained much more powerful and influential than in the USA sports figuration. The amateur model has maintained a very negative stance against MMA, whose spread was based on a market-media professional model (Delalandre and Collinet 2013). The most influential and belligerent player against MMA has been the world of judo (the most established martial sport in the Olympics). This is particularly stark in France (the cradle of modern Olympism), where martial arts/combat sports federations are engaging in a certain kind of 'protectionism' (Delalandre and Quidu 2015). The French Judo Federation President, Jean Luc Rougé, declared in a 2011 interview for *L'Équipe TV* that

> These new combat sports (MMA) seem as if they come out of a video game. These guys are stupid enough to kill each other in front of everyone in a cage and they are well paid. Sport is not war! We must be able to shake hands and go have a beer together afterwards (IMMAF 2015a). [9] [#N9]

The opposition from French judo has remained strong since then. In 2015, Rougé declared that 'MMA is a refuge for jihadists! The Central Directorate of Internal Intelligence (DCRI) has told me so!' (Fayad and Ferret 2015) [10] [#N10] and that MMA was 'an expression of violence that is trivialised. I don't want it in the Federation, it has nothing to do with our culture' (*Le Parisien* 2015). In 2018, he used boxing, an already established combat sport to debase MMA when he declared to *La Nouvelle République*:

> Above all, it is the image it conveys. First, one fight in a cage and then finishes off the opponent by beating him up. It is a loathsome image for the education of the youth. Boxing is also a violent sport, but we stop the fight when one of the boxers puts a knee to the ground. Within the sport, we must take care of the adversary, avoiding harm as much as possible. (Devos 2018, my translation).

In 2019, Rougé stated that he had no problem with the recreational, amateur side of MMA, opening the chance to integrate it within the judo federation. Nonetheless, he roundly rejected the professional version. Considering the role of the state in the control of the activity he commented:

> If we were to integrate or incorporate MMA, we would ask for the possibility of banning certain events. (...) The State must decide on general rules to which all the sports with a search for knock-outs must be subjected (*L'Équipe* 2019, my translation, parenthetical ellipses in original article).

With judo being one of the most prominent martial disciplines linked to the Olympic Movement (Sánchez García 2019a), its fervent opposition to MMA is not surprising. The European Judo Union (EJU) threatened to cancel the European Judo Championships in Glasgow in 2015 on account of the UFC's sponsorship of the event (the UFC eventually withdrew its sponsorship). The President of the International Judo Federation (IJF), Marius Vize, had earlier expressed concerns about the 'spiritual contamination of judo' due to the migration of judokas (judo practitioners) to other sports, in clear reference to MMA (*BJJEE* 2015). In 2015, Jean-Luc Rougé, who is also General Secretary of the International Judo Federation (IJF), officially prohibited all judoka from teaching MMA in France, threatening potential rule breakers with an immediate ban from the Federation (*BJJEE* 2015).

But the rejection movement did not come only from France, nor only judo. For instance, the Irish Martial Arts Commission (IMAC), which was asked to consider taking MMA under its umbrella, has been a harsh critic of the sport. A letter from IMAC to the International Olympic Committee in April 2016 stated: 'MMA, in its current form, is not a sport, and like dog fighting did not deserve to be legitimised. It said it agreed with reports describing MMA as "pornographic, sadistic and voyeuristic to its core"' (*RTÉ* 2017).

3. The medical profession

The British Medical Association (BMA) has maintained a strong opposition to MMA. It campaigned to have it banned in 2007. In 2013, the BMA backed comments made by Peter McCabe, Chief Executive of Headway Brain Injury Association, condemning MMA (Fraser 2013). The medical profession in the UK has not varied its position much in the last decade. After the death of João Carvalho, the cage fighter who died of a brain injury sustained during a MMA bout in April 2016 in the Republic of Ireland, Peter McCabe stated:

> A 28-year-old in the prime of his life has died after someone deliberately punched him in the head. If this had occurred in the street, the public's reaction would be one of horror and revulsion. The police would be called and the fighters arrested. Instead, as a society we continue to sit back and allow audiences to pay money to watch this violence in the name of entertainment. As the popularity of MMA has soared, there are people making vast sums of money by encouraging young people to risk their lives. How do they sleep at night? (McCabe 2016).

In Sweden, a country where amateur MMA is well developed and presents some top-level fighters at promotions such as the UFC, some alarmist claims from the medical profession still occur. In 2015, after the UFC gala at the Tele2 Arena, brain researcher, Professor Martin Ingvar expressed his concern about the relationship between MMA and brain damage and the bad social example it set for children and youth (Ingvar 2015).

Moral panics, civilising offensives, and the development of professional and amateur MMA in Europe

> What is it that motivates critics to take up arms against MMA? The answer is morality. Nothing else. [...] The ignorant and reluctant refuse to see the sport, see the complex performance of someone playing the tactics and the strategies (IMMAF 2015b, translation by IMMAF).

This statement by John Halldin, President of the Swedish MMA Federation, denounced the 'highly involved' critique from non-participants. Techniques of striking while on the ground, elbows (more prone to make cuts and consequently blood) and fighting in a cage tended to be perceived against sports ethics and fighting decorum (Collinet et al. 2013: 1000). In this situation, MMA played the role of the 'moral monster' to be persecuted, allowing a moral purging as happened before with disciplines such as boxing and Muay Thai (Quidu 2019). Moral panics influenced Olympic, European and national sports governing bodies, articulating a rejection movement against unacceptable violent combat sports such as MMA (considered as 'cage

fighting'). French authorities were especially belligerent, France being a key player in both the EU and Olympic movements (see the 'Amateur martial arts/combat sports' sub-section above).

The moral panic reaction fuelling a figuration of rejection was shared initially by the USA and Europe during the 1990s, but while it waned in the USA it remained more or less stable across Europe. As a result, the professional side of the sport could not be fully developed, and the recent development of the amateur side was only permitted to a certain extent. Professional MMA developed mainly in the UK and Ireland, and to a lesser extent in Central Europe. The amateur side of the sport in Europe was centred on the creation of the International MMA Federation, based in Sweden.

1. Professional MMA in Europe.

In a 2007 press release, UFC president Dana White stated:

> We've done so well over here in the last six years in the U.S., we have this product...it translates all the cultural barriers, language barriers and we know this can work worldwide. We opened an office in London and we will have done three events in the UK this year, and they will all have been successful. Our plan is to move out into Europe and next year go into Italy, Spain, Germany, France, etc. (*MMANews* 2007)

Despite this optimistic statement, this 'plan' has not yet fully materialised. Although some changes have occurred in Europe concerning MMA since the UFC first arrived in London in 2002, White's predictions were overly optimistic. Whereas Ireland and the United Kingdom were successful to some extent in the development of MMA promotions, the situation in continental Europe remained quite different. Only central European countries such as Poland developed a sustainable small but consistent professional circuit since the foundation of the fighting promotion KSW in 2004 (Zembura and Żyśko 2015).

UK fighting promotions such as Cage Warriors Fighting Championship (CWFC), established in 2001 and based in London, have remained a reference for the MMA world, with famous UFC stars such as Conor McGregor and Michael Bisping emerging from CWFC. More recently, the British Association of Mixed Martial Arts (BAMMA) has taken the lead since 2009. Events are now broadcasted live on free-to-air television in the UK and Ireland, and the fighting promotion holds a deal with Lonsdale. Moreover, the BAMMA organises joint bouts with important MMA promotions such as Bellator, examples of which include Bellator 169 and BAMMA 27 (Dublin, 2016), as well as Bellator 173 and BAMMA 28 (Belfast, 2017).

How is the MMA's world leading promotion, the UFC, faring within the UK and Ireland? During an interview, Joe Carr, the UFC's Vice President of International Business Development stated the following:

> The United Kingdom is established as our flagship market in Europe and in terms of revenue it is our fifth-largest market worldwide [...] and when we have a PPV model established in the UK I expect this market to catch up with Australia, and possibly even Canada, too (Brown 2017).

UFC 38 in London 2002 was attended by less than 4,000 people and attracted a global buy rate of just 45,000, resulting in the ending of a promising Sky Sports broadcast deal. UFC 70, held in Manchester 2007, pointed to a new beginning and underlined the international nature of UFC, with the twenty fights featuring fighters from eleven different nations. The business started to grow on a more solid basis. According to Brown (2017) UFC Fight Night 107 in London on 18 March 2017 was sold out in a matter of minutes. The expansion

to Ireland has been more recent. For instance, UFC 93 (January 2009), UFC Fight Night: McGregor vs. Brandão (July 2014), and UFC Fight Night 76 (October 2015), all took place in Dublin. In 2016, BT Sport retained exclusive live UFC rights within the UK and Republic of Ireland, paying a huge sum and committing to over 150 hours of live action per year (Brown 2017: para. 16).

Despite an increase in the number of professional MMA events in Europe in the last decade, [11] [#N11] it still faces difficulties in gaining full recognition, especially from the medical profession. For instance, even though the biggest UK MMA promotions have joined forces to form the medical organisation *SafeMMA*, this is not a governmentally sanctioned body. Founded in 2012, *SafeMMA* remains the first and only voluntary medical organisation set up for the protection and safety of MMA competitors in the UK and Ireland. In 2016, BAMMA went one step further and introduced new safety standards for its MMA events, with the inclusion of pre- and post-fight MRi and MRA scans. The case of *SafeMMA* points towards the complexity of civilising offensives within civilising processes. As Powell (2013) remarks, civilising offensives cannot simply be understood as top-down campaigns imposed by the state or other powerful groups. In the case at hand, it seems that a conscious, articulated strategy to civilise the sport came from *within* the MMA community itself.

Nonetheless, the implications of the lack of official recognition could indirectly affect the development of the sport as a whole. As International MMA Federation representative Isobel Carnwath remarked: 'Lack of recognition is creating greater risk in the sport since MMA competitors are effectively outlawed, and many doctors and professionals do not want to touch them' (IMMAF 2017a).

Professional MMA has progresses at a low pace within continental Europe. Whereas in the USA, the social rejection movement led to a reconversion of UFC's format and subsequent growth into the mainstream through television, in mainland Europe the rejection movement prevented the professional circuit of MMA from gaining substantial public visibility. Accordingly, the marketing strategy has maintained an underground label, trying to attract fans through the most spectacular features of violence and blood, something that has prevented it from becoming more mainstream. Greenwell, Thorn, and Simmons's study of promotional artwork in MMA events found that 'When violence was used to promote events, it was mostly limited to local or European organisations' (2015: 17). The authors interpreted this strategy focused on violent features as a way to compensate for the lack of famous fighters to drag audiences in.

Nonetheless, this is not to say that social perception of MMA has remained the same everywhere in Europe. In countries where the professional side has thrived, fan perceptions and interests resembled those of USA fans. Comparing Zembura and Żyśko's (2015) study on Polish spectators with Kim Andrew and Greenwell's (2009) study on US spectators, we find similar spectator composition (young males with higher education degrees) and motives to attend the bout (fighting knowledge and the aesthetics of the game). Polish MMA spectators declared seeking high quality sport performance to be their foremost concern (Zembura and Żyśko 2015: 203). A situation like this is likely to occur in British and Irish fans as well, since the UK and Ireland are the European countries with the highest exposure to UFC events so far.

2. Amateur MMA in Europe.

In 2006, the Swedish Minister of Sports proposed a ban on various full-contact sports, MMA among them. Nonetheless, the ban was overturned due to a campaign from the martial arts community led by the founder of the Swedish MMA Federation (SMMAF), August Wallen. Wallen's argument was based on figures concerning deaths in different sports, arguing for instance that, 'You can't ban MMA based on the argument of death in the sport, unless you ban horse riding first' (IMMAF 2020a). As a result, MMA was regulated in

2007 and the SMMAF received a government license to sanction MMA on all levels, permitting MMA competition in Sweden under strict legal control.

In 2012, the International Mixed Martial Arts Federation (IMMAF) was founded in Stockholm by Wallen, and this same year two different UFC events were held in Stockholm. During 2016, the World MMA Association accepted professional competitors and, as a consequence, the IMMAF became the only worldwide amateur MMA governing body. Nowadays, the IMMAF has close to 100 members and National Olympic Committee recognition in around 40 countries. The organisation also maintains close and supportive relationship with the UFC, which provides 'seed funding' for vital administrative structures and activities of IMMAF.

In order to avoid the sustained figuration of rejection more pervasive in mainland Europe, the IMMAF's strategy was to foster MMA's image of respectability by aligning with the Olympic Movement and its amateur ethos. In fact, the main goal of the IMMAF is for MMA to be included in the Olympic programme. The IMMAF also developed a milder, safer format for the sport, a conscious strategy that could fit within the frame of a civilising offensive from within the MMA community. For instance, the IMMAF adopted a 'safety ladder' strategy, classifying the practice of MMA into six levels and only granting advance to the next level when a practitioner could exhibit sufficient experience and maturity. The rules for amateur MMA introduced more security for fighters (e.g. making elbow-, forearm- and knee-striking to the head forbidden). Moreover, some amateur governing bodies working with the IMMAF, such as the Irish Mixed Martial Arts Association (IMMAA), agreed with *Safe MMA* Ireland in 2016 that a one-off CT scan be mandatory for all competitors in regulated events.

Apart from these safety concerns, some 'cosmetic changes' (Sheard 1997; Sánchez García 2019) were also introduced in the activity (see 'A changing figuration in UFC' section above). For instance, rash-guard tops (upper clothing) became mandatory, marking a clear symbolic demarcation of etiquette from the naked upper body presented in the 'more violent' professional version, helping the activity to present a more appropriate look for the amateur Olympic ethos. [12] [#N12] Shin-guards were also introduced. In a similar vein as that argued by Sheard (1997) in relation to boxing about gloves protecting the hands of the hitter, shin-guards mainly protect the shins of the kicker. The appearance of reducing dangers – though not necessarily damage – by avoiding cuts and blood helped to shift the parameters of acceptability by pushing the more visible manifestations of violence 'behind the scenes'.

Even though the development of amateur MMA in Europe has enjoyed some relative success, there is still a long way to go towards its full recognition as a legitimate sport. the definitive seal of which would be its inclusion within the Olympic Movement. Representatives of established martial arts and combat sports blocked the IMMAF's application in 2016 to the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF), which works in close collaboration with the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Since then, these established bodies have repeatedly blocked the advance of amateur MMA into the Olympic movement.

As discussed above, during the Council of Europe review of 'Martial arts and combat sports/extreme combat activities (MACS/ECA)' in April 2017, leading figures in several martial arts/combat sports (principally judo) opposed the inclusion of MMA in the group of legal combat sports. Then in 2018, the IMMAF was informed by a GAISF administrator that the application had been unsuccessful and in March 2019, after reapplication, GAISF resolved a formal rejection. Then, in January 2020, problems with 'compatibility' were raised by GAISF, denying GAISF Observer Status to MMA. Nonetheless, 'compatibility' issues are far from clear in this respect. As IMMAF CEO Densign White (White 2020: 2) remarked, the similarity in the rules between the combat sports with membership of GAISF is staggering. For instance, savate, Muay Thai and kickboxing all consist of striking the opponent with the hands and the legs and judo, sambo and ju-jitsu are combat sports in

which competitors wear a gi (or kimono) where the objective is to either throw, control or submit the opponents. Nevertheless, no compatibility issue has ever been raised to prevent the acceptance of these disciplines by GAISF.

WADA has helped to ensure that the gates into the global Olympic movement remain closed to MMA. The IMMAF has been applying unsuccessfully for signatory status (despite being compliant with the WADA Code) since 2016. WADA refused the application arguing that it requires the support of GAISF.

Nonetheless, some key agents in the rejection figuration are shifting positions. On 7 February 2020, the French government accepted the regulation of MMA in the country under the auspices of the French Boxing Federation, including the organisation of professional competitions. Sports Minister Roxana Maracineanu commented: 'I took the time to discover this sport that I did not know. If I made this choice, it is for its recognition. It was not easy, and I commend all the federations that have expressed interest' (IMMAF, 2020b). This move from the French authorities is significant for MMA growth in Europe, as Paris will host the Olympic Games in 2024. However, significant opposition from the French judo scene is still present, and 2028 seems to representatives of the IMMAF (2017c) and UFC (*MMA Junkie* 2017) as a more reasonable timeframe for MMA to make a debut in the Olympic Games. The 2028 Olympic Games will be held in Los Angeles. Taking into account the USA's favourable stand towards MMA, IMMAF President Kerrith Brown declared:

> we believe our prospects are strong because MMA is a mainstream sport in the USA and has a strong media, commercial and political presence. MMA is recognised under state laws there and in LA it is regulated lawfully by the California State Athletic Commission. While we will continue lobbying in France and will push for inclusion in 2024, I am more confident about inclusion for 2028 (IMMAF 2017c).

MMA's lack of legitimate status in Europe has kept the sport 'behind the scenes', brought about by several unintended consequences of the intentional strategies and actions of Olympic, European Union and national sports governing bodies in response to the moral panic surrounding it. Despite the civilising effects on the activity (mainly due to reforms coming from within MMA), some decivilising effects were also set in motion. [13].[#N13] In this respect, European far-right movements, especially in Germany and Ukraine, are using MMA (among other activities such as football hooliganism) as a training ground for violent actions and to spread their extreme ideas among the youth (Claus 2020). It could be argued that such a conscious strategy could be categorised as a decivilising offensive. The underground MMA event 'Kampf der Nibelungen' ('Battle of the Nibelungs', a reference to a cycle of medieval Germanic legends set mainly along the Rhein and preserved in Middle High German and Old Norse texts) have been taking place in the German state of Saxony since 2013 and it is growing in numbers. An event held in October 2018 attracted 850 fighters and spectators from across Europe and even the USA (Colborne 2020). This raised the anxieties of authorities, police raided the tournament, and the court imposed a ban on the activity.

Concluding Remarks

The progressive acceptance of MMA alongside the development of professional MMA in the USA (mainly through the UFC) ended up producing new social standards of what could be considered a legitimate combat sport. This pattern was not present to the same extent in Europe. The European figuration of rejection from established groups features more pervasive and persistent moral panic reactions against MMA. That

permitted only a relatively successful professional model in Ireland, the United Kingdom and Poland, and a restricted development of the amateur model of the sport. MMA in continental Europe remained on the margins of acceptability and legitimacy of the established combat sports. Civilising offensives from within the MMA community implied the introduction of safety measures plus some 'cosmetic changes' as a way of presenting a more appropriate look according to the amateur Olympic ethos. Overall, the relegation of MMA 'behind the scenes' of social life had some unintended consequences. For instance, the decivilising offensive deployed by the far-right, trying to co-opt the sport for the spread of their extreme ideas and recruitment of new members.

In summary, the international development and organisation of MMA nowadays has two complementary poles: a professional model led by the UFC in the USA, and an amateur model led by the IMMAF in Europe. [14] [#N14] It is still very soon to see if the association between the professional and amateur models on both sides of the Atlantic will be successful in gaining full recognition for the sport of MMA worldwide. The inclusion of MMA in the Olympics would be a definitive landmark but, for the moment at least, remains out of reach. It also remains uncertain whether the European rejection figuration will persist strong enough to prevent MMA's inclusion within Olympism, or whether it is merely delaying advances in the global acceptance of the sport at both professional and amateur levels.

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Endnotes

1. On the connection between martial arts/combat sports to different civilising processes, see Sánchez García (2008) on boxing in Spain; Sánchez García (2018) on boxing, fencing and duelling in England, France and Germany; Sánchez García (2019b) on MMA in the USA; Sánchez García (2019a) on martial arts in Japan. [#N1-ptr1]
2. Even though it may seem that Elias's *magnum opus* analysed the European case in toto, the author made constant comparison from the French, German and English cases. Subsequently, different books by Elias analysed the French (Elias 2005), English (Elias 2008; Elias and Dunning 2008 [1986]) and German cases (Elias 2013) in a more specific way. [#N2-ptr1]
3. To understand the complex relationships between civilising patterns and the development of institutionalised violence, the Japanese case is worth noting. In Japan, the creation of a martial arts-inspired national habitus previous to the Second World War helped to establish MMA as acceptable as in the USA, even though Japanese citizens do not carry weapons; see Sánchez García (2018) for the development of martial arts (more specifically MMA) within the Japanese civilising process. As in the US and European cases, MMA experienced a strong official backlash in Japan, even though the reasons were not the same. The decline of Pride (Japanese equivalent to American UFC from 1997 to 2007) was not related to a problematic threshold of violence. The public rejection emerged due to the public exposure of the ties between organised crime (the Yakuza) and MMA promotion (Sánchez García 2019a: 210). [#N3-ptr1]
4. The amateur–professional debate was closely bound to class relations. The institutionalisation of sports in Britain featured a high degree of resistance from upper classes (champions of the amateur code) against the professionalisation model. From the perspective of these upper-class proponents of amateurism, professional values would not only spoil the 'essence' of sport, but the professional sports would expand participation to the lower classes, considered as non-desirable social inferiors by the upper classes (for the specific example of rugby, see Sheard and Dunning 2004). The same happened in other European countries such as France (for the specific case of fencing, see Sánchez García 2018a). In the USA, class relations were not as marked and pro-amateurism not as strong as in the British/European patterns. Thus, a market driven, professional model of sport found less resistance to thrive in American soil than in Europe. [#N4-ptr1]
5. Fighters is a general term denoting martial arts/combat sports participants. They can be professional athletes competing at top level or recreational athletes. Throughout the text more specific terminology or characterization of the term fighter is used when needed. [#N5-ptr1]
6. The acronyms NBA, NHL, and MLB stand for National Basketball Association (the professional basketball league in North America), National Hockey League (the professional hockey league in North America) and Major League Baseball (the highest professional baseball league in North America). [#N6-ptr1]
7. Elias (2012 [1939]) defined habitus as emotional or affective management (*Affekthaushalt*) or 'modelling of urges' (*Triebmodellierung*), in the balance between external controls and internal self-controls. This is normally attached to what Elias (2012 [1939]: 5) termed the 'psychogenesis' of individuals taking part of specific figurations, developed in dynamic processes in what is identified as 'sociogenesis' (2012 [1939]: 304). See Sánchez García (2013) for a specific study of Elias's notion of habitus in combat sports and martial arts. [#N7-ptr1]
8. My thanks to the anonymous reviewers for bringing this case to my attention. [#N8-ptr1]
9. The whole interview can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iem6Kr_Fn-c [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iem6Kr_Fn-c]; the translation in the quotation is by the IMMAF. [#N9-ptr1]
10. The whole interview can be accessed at https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2vc34r [https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2vc34r]. [#N10-ptr1]

11. For example, UFC Fight Night 93, in 2016 at the Barclaycard Arena in Hamburg, Germany; UFC Fight Night 86 in 2016 at the Arena Zagreb in Zagreb, Croatia; UFC Fight Night 87 in 2016 at the Ahoy Rotterdam in Rotterdam, Netherlands. In 2017, UFC Fight Night 113 took place in Glasgow, UFC Fight Night 115 in Rotterdam and UFC Fight Night 118 in Poland's Gdansk. In March 2018, UFC Fight Night 127 was held in London. On 15 September 2018, UFC Fight Night 136 was organised in Moscow, a city that would witness the UFC Fight Night 163 on 9 November 2019 as well. On April 20 2019, UFC Fight Night 149 was held in Saint Petersburg. On 1 June 2019, UFC Fight Night 153 took place in Stockholm, Sweden. [#N11-ptr1]
12. IMMAF President, Kerrith Brown, declared: 'The decision was made to introduce rashguards for all competitors in order to visually separate Amateur MMA from the Professional side of the sport for fans, broadcast partners and for branding purposes. For the viewer, we would like to create an instantly recognisable distinction between the two levels of the sport. In a nation vs. nation tournament the rashguard creates more opportunities for distinguishing different national teams and also is more visually appealing' (IMMAF 2016a). [#N12-ptr1]
13. See Rohloff (2019, especially pp. 148–171) on the complex relationship between moral panics, civilising offensives and civilising–decivilising processes. The author even points out the possibility of understanding moral panics on the light of Cas Wouters's notion of informalisation–reformalisation (Rohloff 2019: 157), a key point in the development of MMA (Sánchez García and Malcolm 2010; Sánchez García 2019) and contemporary bare-knuckle fighting (Sánchez García 2020). [#N13-ptr1]
14. The relationship between these two organisations is strong. In 2017, the UFC and the IMMAF renewed their partnership agreement. UFC Chief Operating Officer Ike Lawrence Epstein declared: 'We are pleased to extend our partnership and continue our global support of the International Mixed Martial Arts Federation through 2017. In the five years since IMMAF launched in 2012, it has quickly expanded its footprint to more than 65 countries worldwide, consistently promoting higher safety and regulatory standards and greater recognition of the sport and its many incredible athletes' (IMMAF 2017b). [#N14-ptr1]

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