

The Violent Octagon (A Critique of UFC Fighting)

(By Toshio U.-P.)

As a student and assistant instructor of WTF Taekwondo, I have developed a bit of an interest and curiosity in Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), which incorporates a diversity of close-up and distant sparring styles from different parts of the globe. However, while Korean Taekwondo is considered a sport which can be found at both the Olympics/Paralympics and Pan Am/Parapan Am Games, UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship), which is heavily televised in North America as the largest and most common MMA promotion company, appears to deviate from the realm of sports, through its violent gladiator prize-fighting style. While Taekwondo top-level competitors now face off in an octagon-shaped ring without physical barriers, trying to better their opponent by scoring self-controlled points to the body and head, UFC MMA bouts take place in a caged octagon where knockouts are encouraged and in which competitors face off with full force blows and very little restraint. Additionally, in Taekwondo sparring, the use of a hogu (chest protector), helmet with available eye-protection, and other guards to protect the arms, legs, feet, groin, and mouth are required, whereas in UFC style MMA there is very little protective equipment to shield the body's many sensitive areas, especially when the strikes often occur recklessly and at such high intensity. After seeing many mainstream television commercials promoting the bloody and graphic nature of UFC bouts, broadcasted to lure potential spectators of all ages into modern online betting forums, I was particularly nauseated by some of the octagon rules which allow for: flying knees or elbows and 'ground-and-pound' attacks. The latter attack style which is particularly gruesome with its blows, consists of the aggressor pinning the opponent down in a grappling position and directing punches and elbows (usually to the head) while atop of them. While parallels with the Roman coliseum and ancient gladiator death matches can be drawn with the modern UFC-style fighting of today, even more disturbing are the repercussions of heavily promoted octagon fighting on younger generations, who through cheering on their favorite idols, may also learn to imitate their illicit fighting moves in a world where the school and court systems have zero tolerance for such forms of physical assault. In addition to this, younger viewers and modern coliseum voyeurs may also be tempted into backing modern PED (Performance Enhancing Drug) usage, in an environment where heavily-advertised prize fighters often seek out such wayward ways to outperform opponents and to gain the prominence and favour of a powerful gambling and gangster elite. With the Paris 2024 Olympics now underway, I will stay tuned for the different styles of martial arts (and other featured fighting sports such as wrestling and boxing), while being sure to continue tuning out of the flashy and deviant antics of the violent octagon.