

## EBI format improvements *by David 'Silverfox' Karchmer*

While there are a variety of quality grappling rule sets available for fans and competitors to choose from, the Eddie Bravo Invitational format is quickly becoming the de facto standard for no-gi submission-only tournaments. In fact, renowned grappling coach, John Danaher, recently opined that *'Eddie Bravo's format is the best proposal for advancing submission grappling'*, and he might be right. But while the format does offer a great mix of spectator appeal and a true representation of the art, it still could use some tweaking that improves it even further.

While most modern rule sets are a reflection of the evolution of grappling competition emphasizing positional dominance, submission grappling is somewhat regressive. Sub-only tournament matches most closely resemble challenge matches between schools or individual rivals, or maybe just sparring that grapplers are practice week in, week out in training, where the only goal is submission.

The EBI format's secret is the ability to offer something to both the competitor and the fan. For the competitor, they have virtually no restrictions on sportsmanlike techniques, reasonable length match duration, and the ability to show off both attacking and defensive prowess. For the fan, they are guaranteed that a winner will be declared, matches are reasonable length in a tournament format, and the overtime period challenge can be quite exciting.

Here are some observations for future events:

**Written rules.** Regardless of how simplified the rule set is, there should always be a written rule book to refer to. It's not necessary to hand a copy to every spectator, but I think one should exist and always be made available to competitors, coaches, and referees, as well as any curious fan. Writing it down solidifies everyone's understanding, as well as sets a foundation that can be built upon on as things are added, changed, or deleted within the platform. It doesn't need to be lengthy per se, but understand that anything that does happen and is not included is subject to on-the-spot rulings, which doesn't always play well for live events with prize money on the line.

**Keep it simple, but not too simple.** One of the strengths of the EBI format is simplicity. There are simply not a ton of rules, no thick handbook for either competitor or referee to understand. This makes it easy for competitors to know what's permitted, and also easy for both casual fans and hardcore grappling spectators to understand. On the surface this seems ideal and very liberating, but after seven events so far ( EBI 8 schedule for September 2016 ), some rules' questions have started to be raised from things occurring during event matches. As these items occur, they need to be addressed for future events. Additionally, any

and all possible scenarios really need advanced thought so they can be handled appropriately when the issue presents itself.

**Time keeping is important.** While keeping the proper time is always an essential function in every tournament, it takes on additional significance in the EBI format. Firstly, in the regulation period, if the clock is not stopped appropriately by the referee for those things that the rules specify, it may literally rob opportunity for submissions within that period and prevent overtime. Secondly, once in overtime, the way a winner is determined can depend specifically on two time measurements – who scored the fastest submission if both competitors submit in the same round; or if after three rounds with no submissions, overtime escapes are added up and the quickest overall time wins. This means the time keeping board, communication between referee and timekeeper, and timekeeper calculations are all critical to determining a winner in any given round.

**Use gathered data for improvement.** Most rules sets have been battle tested over a number of years, dozens of tournaments, and thousands of matches. With this much information, it becomes much easier to spot trends, trouble areas, and really the grappling behavior that the rules are driving. EBI's 16 man brackets with a couple of added super fights only provides about 15-20 fights per event, roughly 125 matches total in seven events, to review and see if any issues need to be addressed. Some issues might not appear at all, and then suddenly several of the same circumstances might crop up. I think some glaring issues became most visible during EBI 7.

Here are some specific rule concerns that need to be clarified or improved:

**Penalties / Disqualification.** In a perfect world, nothing would ever happen during a match that would raise an eyebrow to the grappling community. But in the spirit of fairness for both competitors, it is more likely that eventually things will happen that need to be addressed by penalties and/or disqualification. Questions need to be asked and answered about unsportsmanlike activities or anything that can be considered outside the scope of fair play. If you can think of any that can cause concern and they happen, there has to be a predetermined course of treatment. If they're not treated by automatic disqualification, then it has to be determined what kind of penalties can be assessed in a sub-only, no points format that are meaningful deterrents or punishments.

**Uniform commands, gestures, ring control.** These items are specific to the referees, but it's been observed that there does not appear to be agreed upon methodology for these three significant officiating items. For instance, commands should be verbal for competitors and signals for spectators and timekeeper; gestures should be displayed consistently by any and all referees; and ring control including positional recreation needs to be consistently applied.

**Border enforcement.** It is currently unclear the treatment of competitors as they approach the edge of the mat. The EBI venue is on an elevated stage, so one edge is literally a drop off the stage, and the other remaining edges seem to be hardwood floors with some barriers. As we saw in the Baret Yoshida vs. Mike Davila match in EBI 7, the competitors were allowed to leave the matted space and continue fighting on the outside flooring near barriers and signs. This resulted in an arm bar victory for Davila while clearly off the mat. It would seem to make the most sense to have some kind of border enforcement, but it is unclear what the actual rules permit. It should be clear to competitors and fans alike under what circumstances the action will stop at the edge of the mat, and how the match will be resumed if action is stopped.

**Settling disputes, handling errors.** As we saw during one of the overtime periods in the Bill Cooper vs. Geo Martinez match at EBI 7, controversy erupted during a position change. Martinez seemed to be communicating with the referee that he felt he had effectively escaped the back position, and it caused the match to be stopped for discussion. At some point, the referee seemed unable to resolve the situation, and Eddie Bravo came out and made a decision to do a restart after recreating the position. Ultimately, this controversy did not decide that particular match, but it did raise some questions about what input competitors should be providing the referee during the match; if competitors are able to argue their case with the referee during the match and then ask for a review; how the timekeeping is affected during these discussions; and then, the implication whether Eddie Bravo serves as the deciding arbiter for disputes or potential referee errors even for matches that he is not the official on the mat. While this scenario may have been an extreme example, it did open the door for discussion and it's safe to assume something like that could happen in future matches.

The Eddie Bravo Invitational started with some clever ideas about the presentation of professional grappling. As this event and the sport of grappling move forward, the key to success is improvement in certain areas based on the data collected from the existing events. The hope for this author is that some of the elements highlighted in this article will be adopted to help this event evolve both for entertainment, as well as a true representation of the art of submission grappling.