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# The Reasons Why MMA Is Safer Than Boxing

The sweet science of boxing has been prime, household entertainment for over a century. To this day, it leaves us on the edge of our seat, craving more. However, past all the fun and fanfare, there are major safety concerns, as time and brute force have not been kind to its practitioners.

With the popularity of MMA rising, a lot of boxing fans are turning to MMA as an alternative. It is a sport that encompasses all the best elements of boxing and offers much more. However, we do urge you to do your own homework on the subject. This article will simply aim to inform you how MMA is safer than boxing.

Here are 10 of the top reasons MMA is safer than boxing.

## 1) Head trauma is much higher in boxing

A lot of the time, when we see blood, we associate it with injury, and in proportion. The more someone bleeds, the more damage they've taken. This is for good reason. It's an evolutionary instinct. There's a reason blood is so bright red. It's nature's warning signal. In a sense, it's our very essence, without it, we could not live.

However, past causal observation, there are a lot of other, more devastating injuries happening under the surface that do not have an immediate indicator. Concussions are not visible, but they are arguably a more pressing concern. If a fighter sustains a cut on the cheek that is bleeding profusely, chances are he is able to continue fighting without major risk to his long-term health. Such a surface injury will only cause minimal repercussions if any. Conversely, certain levels of head trauma can be career-ending, and the effects linger on much after retirement.

## 2) MMA provides many options for victory

In MMA, a fight can be won without throwing a single strike. Ground-based fighters such as jiu-jitsu practitioners and wrestlers have the option of shooting in for a double leg takedown, masterfully taking their opponent's back, and then sinking in a rear-naked choke. Although it's rare, MMA fights have been won with little to no striking at all. In most cases, both fighters are ready to fight again, without any injury. Strikes are the most damaging and injury-inducing way to win a fight. For this reason, MMA is much safer by virtue of option alone. For anyone that's spent any time on the mats, wrestling and Brazilian jiu-jitsu are in a rare category of martial arts that you can train with 100% intensity and be at minimal risk of injury. When it comes to a striking based art, for example, you can only increase the intensity occasionally due to the risk of injury being so high.

## 3) There have been more boxing-related deaths

The jury is still out on this one since MMA is relatively new and we do not have much data. To give you a synopsis, there have been seven deaths in MMA from sanctioned bouts and nine from unsanctioned bouts. Since the late 1800s, roughly 500 boxers have died so far. If we take

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into account the time span and scale that down, MMA is still ahead by quite a margin. Of course, there are other factors that come into play since professional MMA was not around in the 1800s. We have a greater display of regulation enforcement and higher use of performance-enhancing drugs in the modern era just to name two. But we are confident if the data trends persist at this rate, MMA will retain its position as one of the safest combat sports.

#### **4) Boxing related injuries are more severe**

Looking into some post-fight data, research has concluded that MMA fighters are more likely to sustain an injury during their bout. A Canadian study done in Alberta showed that 59.4 percent of MMA fighters and 49.8 percent of boxers sustained some sort of injury during their bout. However, the level of injury was much more serious in boxing. Using 'loss of consciousness' as a barometer, boxers we're at 7.1 percent compared to MMA fighters who were reported at 4.2 percent. Boxers were also much more likely to be suspended after a fight due to medical reasons.

The severity of an injury is very relevant when it comes to combat sports. Minor injuries heal much quicker and do not have long-term effects. It not only dictates whether the fighter can continue with his or her career in a healthy manner, but it also affects the credibility of the sport for future ventures such as the Olympic Games.

#### **5) Rules and regulations are safer in MMA**

In MMA, as soon as a fighter is downed, his or her opponent can rush in, land a few more strikes, and end the fight. In boxing, however, when you are knocked down, you receive a 'ten count'. A ten count is simply when the referee counts to ten, and if he deems the boxer can continue, the fight goes on and the boxer is susceptible to additional damage. Furthermore, an MMA fighter can choose to lock in a submission which is arguably a safer option to end the fight. The rules of MMA promote 'fight-ending' scenarios much more frequently which is safer than fights going to a decision regardless of the sport. More time in the ring or octagon simply increases the window of opportunity for an injury to occur.

#### **6) Boxing gloves are more hazardous when it comes to head strikes**

The main danger of using boxing gloves to strike the head is the amount of acceleration, and consequently, the amount of force a fighter can generate with their strikes. Boxing gloves are simply heavier, and if we apply Newton's Second Law, we can easily conclude this will result in more force. This causes the brain to rattle inside the head much more violently.

The main advantage of using boxing gloves is that they protect the fighter's knuckles from damage that would be caused by the impact of a punch much better than MMA gloves do. From the opponent's standpoint, they are protected from the sharp knucklebones in the hand (as opposed to using no gloves). These bones are sharp and can generally cause fight-ending cuts. The reason this is so unfavorable from a sports perspective is that finishing a fighter with a cut around the eye is not conducive to their skill. The purpose of combat sports is implicit in its name, it is a sport and therefore the aim of any contest should be to accurately measure a fighter's skill.

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MMA gloves, on the other hand, are denser and lighter. They do not protect the fighter's hands as well as boxing gloves, but the exchange between the two fighters will result in a lot less damage to the head.

The British Medical Association states that gloves do not reduce the risk of brain injury. On the contrary, they can actually increase the likelihood of a brain injury.

A five-year study on injuries in boxing was done by the Nevada State Athletic Commission. They concluded that the padding used in the gloves was correlated to the rates of injury in boxing.

## **7) Longer rounds in Boxing mean more damage**

The bout time of a standard, professional MMA fight is 3, five-minute rounds (with the exception of a UFC title fight which is 5, five-minute rounds), as opposed to boxing which is 8 to 10, three-minute rounds. That comes to 15 minutes for MMA and anywhere from 24 to 30 minutes for a boxing match. At first glance, it seems like MMA is the clear winner in this category, but the type of strikes being executed has to be considered as well.

Boxing has a natural edge in terms of damage control when it comes to kicks. A shin to the skull has the potential to cause devastating damage. The amount of force generated by kicks is much larger than punches. One advantage of a head kick knockout is that the fight ends there and then. Sustained damage is not an issue in this scenario.

In further exploring the force generated by kicks compared to punches, a biomedical engineer named Cindy Bir at Wayne State University provides additional insight. She investigated that boxers could generate up to 5 thousand newtons of force with a single punch. After researching several different fighting styles from many experts in the martial arts world, she found that they could generate 9 thousand newtons of force through a kick.

It is fairly obvious that this is no revelation since there is more body mass behind a kick, but it definitely helps us quantify the amount of damage being done by different types of strikes. The keyword here is sustained damage. Taking consistent damage over a longer period of time is measured to be greater than taking a lot of force all at once.

## **8) Boxing training is a lot rougher**

A lot of the injury is sustained during sparring or training. Not the fight itself. To garner a level of boxing skill that would hold up in the ring, a certain intensity is required once in a while. Even with the best headgear out there, head injuries cannot be completely eliminated.

Conversely, a good chunk of MMA training is groundwork and takedowns. Intensity can be maintained while preventing injury, and even when injury does occur, the result is a limb injury, something much less minor than a head injury.

Trevor Wittman, an MMA, and boxing coach was criticized for only putting boxers through 40 rounds of sparring before big fights. On average, most boxers go through a whopping 120 rounds prior to a big fight. Add that up and that is a lot of cranial damage.

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If you are training boxing multiple times a week, you are going 10 to 12 rounds and facing a fresh opponent every time. Then you come back 3 days later to do the same. That is where the problem lies. MMA, on the other hand, varies with its level of intensity and mixes in grappling with striking.

## 9) MMA fighters are scheduled to fight less frequently

Within a year, MMA fighters generally fight 2 to 4 times. This gives them plenty of time for recovery. On the other hand, boxers have been known to fight 2 to 3 times within three months. This is also a big factor that contributes to additional damage being received.

## 10) Ocular complications of boxing

Dr. Gustavo Corrales published a paper on eye trauma in boxing. In his findings, he reported that years after head and eye trauma, boxers were at risk for glaucoma. The immediate consequences of optics may not be apparent immediately. Dr. Corrales states that in many cases, eye-related injuries revealed themselves after a prolonged period of time. For instance, a boxer who endured a lot of trauma in his career may end up with glaucoma up to 10 years later.

It can also be tricky to judge the potential long-term vision risks for boxers. There is no framework in place for tracking the incident, nature or cause of eye injuries in boxing. So it is up in the air when or how certain injuries came to be. Tracking incidents is made even harder because some injuries can only affect one eye and sometimes athletes will hide this to stay in the fight.

Dr. Corrales' work also found signs of optic trauma in 66 to 76 percent of boxers and 21 to 58 percent had vision-threatening injuries.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, boxing and MMA both come with their own set of dangers. MMA injuries tend to be more frequent, minor, and limb focused while boxing injuries are heavily concentrated on the head and can follow a fighter years after retirement. There can be safer ways to train in the art of boxing if certain measures are put into place. Many boxers have shown us defensive boxing can work wonders, not only as a legitimate strategy to win fights but also an intelligent way to protect yourself for post-retirement celebration. Overall though, the numbers reveal MMA as the safer sport. Regardless of your choice of which sport to train, there is a certain degree of risk you will have to embrace. Hopefully, you are now able to make a more informed decision towards the choice of which form of combat is best for you.

## Sources

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