

SPOTLIGHT
Unarmed Combat Rule Changes Effective October 16, 2019
(Published November 1, 2019)

The [Michigan Unarmed Combat Regulatory Act](#) (the “Act”), MCL 338.3601 *et seq.*, allows for the promulgation of rules to regulate ring officials, contestants, and promoters and to develop standards that protect the health and safety of contestants.¹ In November 2018, the Department, in consultation with the Unarmed Combat Commission, began a rulemaking to align the Unarmed Combat Rules with the recent changes to the Act.² Additionally, the rules address safety concerns at unarmed combat events and, where possible, mimic rules previously adopted by the Association of Boxing Commissions. These rules apply to events occurring and documents and applications submitted October 16, 2019, or later.

Some of the changes to the rules are stylistic in nature, but several changes will affect unarmed combat events in the state. Note that this document only summarizes some of the rule changes. Promoters, officials, inspectors, ringside physicians, contestants, and other event participants are strongly encouraged to review all changes to the rules to ensure compliance with the new requirements. A link to the “draft rule language” and “final rule language” can be found [here](#).

NOTABLE CHANGES TO THE UNARMED COMBAT RULES

New Definitions

There are a few new definitions to the Unarmed Combat Rules, and key among them is the new definition of “Grounded.” It aligns with the Association of Boxing Commissions’ definition that addresses safety concerns with the foul of kicking or kneeing the head of a grounded contestant.³ New Rule 339.101(1)(g) defines “grounded” as

when a mixed martial artist has any part of the body, other than fingers and the soles of both feet, touching the fighting area floor. A mixed martial artist is grounded if the palm or closed fist of one hand, or any other body part, is touching the fighting area floor.

Weight Classes

In 2017, the Act was amended to remove the weight classes established by statute and require the setting of weight classes by rule.⁴ Rule 339.201(2) & (3) establishes permanent weight classes for boxing and mixed martial arts contests. The classes range from mini flyweight to heavyweight for boxing and strawweight to super heavyweight for mixed martial artist with varying weight differentials.⁵

¹ MCL 338.3622(4)

² [2017 PA 146](#)

³ Rule 339.232(1) (r) – (t).

⁴ MCL 338.3654a(2)(e)

⁵ For more information on the weight differentials for boxing and mixed martial arts, see Rule 339.201(2) & (3).

Experience Requirement for Professional Licensure

Previously, professional contestants did not need to demonstrate professional licensure in another jurisdiction or have a minimum amount of relevant amateur experience. Beginning October 16, 2019, to obtain a professional boxer license, an applicant must have fought a minimum of seven amateur contests or 28 amateur rounds.⁶ To obtain a professional mixed martial artist license, an applicant must have fought a minimum of five sanctioned amateur contests.⁷ Alternatively, professional boxer or professional mixed martial artist contestants who have a professional license from another state, country, or tribal nation may now use reciprocity to obtain the equivalent license in Michigan.

Commission Member Seating

The Act requires promoters to provide a seat at an unarmed combat event to an Unarmed Combat Commission member that is “immediately adjacent” to a ring or cage.⁸ In addition, the Act requires that promoters provide each commission member an “additional seat” in the venue.⁹ To prevent any confusion, Rule 339.205b clarifies that “immediately adjacent” means “in the first or second row from the ring or cage” with the “additional seat” not necessarily in the first or second row of the ring or cage.

Cloth-Based Tape and Ankle Wrap Requirements

Previously, “surgeon’s adhesive tape” was required to be placed either directly on the contestant’s hands or on top of soft gauze to hold it in place, but there was no mention of foot or ankle wraps or joint supports. Effective October 16, 2019, cloth-based tape must be used for hand, foot, and ankle wraps and joint supports.¹⁰ If a contestant chooses to use an ankle wrap, it must consist of soft gauze not more than 13 yards long and not more than two inches wide; it must be held in place by not more than 10 feet of cloth-based tape per ankle.¹¹ Also, water or any other substance must not be used on foot or ankle wraps.¹²

Contest Official Requirements

Previously, an official was prohibited from merely being under the influence of alcohol or drugs while “performing his or her duties.” Effective October 16, 2019, no official may “use or be under the influence of alcohol or drugs while in attendance at an event [emphasis added.]” As before, officials may be subject to a drug and alcohol test upon the request of the department. Now, there must be at least two licensed referees present for every contest, and a promoter must designate at least one alternate event official for each of the arranged officials for a contest.¹³

⁶ Rule 339.203(3)

⁷ Rule 339.203(4)

⁸ MCL 338.3647(3)

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ Rules 339.207 and 339.210

¹¹ Rule 339.207(f)

¹² Rule 339.207(h)

¹³ Rule 339.215.

Conduct During Events and Scorecard Records

Before a contest occurring October 16, 2019, or later begins,

- the win-loss record of each contestant must be announced when the contestants are introduced.¹⁴
- If requested by a contestant before or during a contest, the promoter must ensure that an interpreter is available to translate.¹⁵
- A promoter must retain and maintain the scorecards and tabulations sheets for one year, which is consistent with an existing statutory requirement.¹⁶

Types of Contest Results and Scoring of Incomplete Round

Now, if a mixed martial artist fails to answer the bell at the beginning of a round or does not want to continue the contest, then the mixed martial artist will lose by technical knockout.¹⁷ Rule 339.226a adds the circumstances under which specific types of contest results occur for boxing events.¹⁸ And Rule 339.223 adds that there is no scoring of an incomplete round, but a referee penalty, if assessed, must be deducted when a scorekeeper calculates the final score.¹⁹

Boxing and Mixed Martial Arts Fouls

Boxing and mixed martial arts judges and referees should be aware of new procedures for fouls committed by contestants during an unarmed combat contest. Rule 339.231 lists the causes of fouls during a boxing contest, adding the circumstances under which disqualification occurs and clarifying what penalties result when a foul occurs. It further requires that only a referee may assess a foul. Rule 339.232 lists the causes of fouls during a mixed martial arts contest and also adds information regarding disqualification and resulting penalties, similarly clarifying that only a referee may assess a foul.²⁰ All officials should review these changes before officiating their next unarmed combat contest.

Female Contestant Health and Protection

Pregnancy tests required to be submitted under Rule 339.235 must now be performed by a licensed health professional or at a licensed healthcare facility.²¹ Additionally, if desired, a female contestant may now wear a breast protector during a contest.²²

¹⁴ Rule 339.217(2).

¹⁵ Rule 339.217(7).

¹⁶ Rules 339.229(10) and 339.230 (19).

¹⁷ Rule 339.226(b)(iii)

¹⁸ Rule 339.226a.

¹⁹ Rule 339.223(14).

²⁰ Rules 339.231 and 339.232

²¹ Rule 339.23 (4)

²² Rule 339.245

Event Officials' Compensation

The baseline compensation table for event officials will now be adjusted annually based on the Detroit consumer price index.²³ Additionally, promoters are reminded that they must disclose the amount paid to each event official to the Department, consistent with statutory requirements. Upon request, this information may be treated as confidential and not subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.²⁴

Drug and Alcohol Testing

As always, the department representative, who is either an inspector or a Department employee, is responsible for the collection of specimens for a drug and alcohol test. However, Rule 339.269(1) now requires that the department representative be the only individual informed that a contestant was specifically selected to submit to a drug and alcohol test before the test is administered.

²³ Rule 339.265(2)

²⁴ Rule 339.265(3) & (4)