

## Mike Coughlin dissects the June MMA rankings

• The Half-Guarded Truth •

By: Mike Coughlin

HalfGuardedTruth@hotmail.com

For the week of 06/22/08

• June MMA Rankings •

Alright, cats and kittens, this is a new one for me. For some time, as kind of an "exclusive" for The Board~! here at figurefouronline.com, I've been doing the Five Star Radio/Half-Guarded Truth MMA rankings. This has always been done at the request of others. I'm not a big proponent of rankings, as outside of the general public having a good idea of who the top guy is, it doesn't matter. Then so long as we all know who occupies the 10-15 slots below that guy, in any combination, I'm happy. But, I know these things are fun, and create some super-duper, neat-to-rad, debates so I've been doing them. I'm "officially" publishing them for the first time. With the recent merger of wrestlingobserver.com and figurefouronline.com, I feel a greater sense of importance. That, or I've been putting way too much work into these things to let just a few goofs on The Board~! read them. I'll "officially" update the rankings once a month, but will probably make little changes here and there on The Board~! So, if you're a member, head to the board and check out the ONGOING UPDATES~! And, if you're not a member, surely the ability to see how one man, completely off his rocker, ranks MMA fighters is reason enough to subscribe.

One basic rule I try to which I try to adhere with rankings is the following: if Fighter A beats Fighter B, Fighter A is ranked higher than Fighter B. That's simple enough. That doesn't necessarily mean I think Fighter A is BETTER than Fighter B but if fights are to mean anything, then a win means you're "ranked better" than the guy you beat. How can I watch Anderson Silva tap out Dan Henderson then rank Henderson above Silva? Two guys met, they fought, one guy one, he's better. That's the entire point of a fight. If they fight again, that doesn't mean I'll break down a fight that way, but for rankings purposes, a win is a win is a win.

Until either 1) Fighter A loses or 2) something extraordinary occurs that can justify Fighter B leaping over Fighter A, Fighter A should be ranked above Fighter B. In general, once a fighter is slotted at #1, he does not lose that spot until he loses. This is unique to the top slot, as you can lose a #7 ranking like a fat man loses an M&M in a couch cushion.

There are a few exceptions though, typically when I'm ranking someone #1 only by default. For example, when Nick Diaz beat Takanori Gomi, but then tested positive for pot, I couldn't really rank Nick ahead of Gomi because he was on suspension and technically cheated to win, but I also thought it was weird for Gomi to be ranked #1 when the entire world watched him tap out in his last fight. I mean, how can you be the best fighter in your division when you lost your last fight? For that reason, the #1 ranked lightweight has always been up in the air. But, BJ Penn's current ranking feels "solid" enough to be that I think the, "can" be unseated until he loses a rule will apply. It's kind of the old "the man, you've got to beat the man" philosophy.

Now then, all the explanations are out of the way, onto the fun:

### HEAVYWEIGHT

1) Fedor Emelianenko

2) Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira

3) Randy Couture

4) Josh Barnett

5) Tim Sylvia

6) Andrei Arlovski

7) Fabricio Werdum

8 ) Gabriel Gonzaga

9) Heath Herring

10) Ben Rothwell

#### JUSTIFICATIONS:

In some respects, the most stable division in MMA for several years, with Fedor reigning as king for many moons. However, a great deal of controversy surrounds the Russian as he hasn't faced elite competition in some time. That said, he has completely destroyed Nogueira on numerous occasions and for that reason alone (not to mention the destruction of an at-his-peak CroCop and the brutal beating of Herring) he remains at the top of my heavyweight rankings. I simply cannot place Nog above Fedor until Fedor loses.

The July 19 Affliction card will answer a lot of questions as to where Fedor is ranked as Tim Sylvia is an unquestionable top 10 HW. In fact, with Sylvia, Fedor, Arlovski, Rothwell, and Barnett all fighting on that show, it may end up being the most significant MMA show (whereas it concerns the Five Star Radio/Half-Guarded Truth Rankings and, really, aren't these rankings the most important in the world?) in a long, long time.

And, because I know folks will wonder, the Rothwell ranking is incredible tenuous. The #10 slot is the one ranking where I will change things on a whim, often using it to "spotlight" a fighter that is a bit under the radar. I don't expect to remain #10 for very long, but so many interesting fights have taken place in the past year with folks moving up and down the rankings like a stripper desperate for that last tip that Rothwell, complete with a decent winning streak over the likes of Roy Nelson and Ricco Rodriguez, is #10 for now. (Cue ominous music.)

## LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT

- 1) Quinton "Rampage" Jackson
- 2) Forrest Griffin
- 3) Chuck Liddell
- 4) Mauricio "Shogun" Rua
- 5) Lyoto Machida
- 6) Wanderlei Silva
- 7) Keith Jardine
- 8) Rameau Sokoudjou
- 9) Ricardo Arona
- 10) Antonio Rogerio Nogueira

## JUSTIFICATIONS:

One of those divisions where the #1 ranked fighter is almost universally agreed upon with everyone else falling wherever you please "and, ultimately, that's all that matters. For a long time, I had the #1 and #2 LHWs as Liddell then Shogun. Rampage beat Liddell, so it then became Shogun and Rampage. Shogun lost to Griffin, hence Forrest being ranked ahead of Rua. But, the Rua loss also meant that Rampage was now "eligible" to be ranked ahead of him, as that loss and the Liddell win were enough to justify Rampage now being ranked ahead of someone that had previously beat him (same for Rampage being ahead of Wanderlei Silva).

Jardine had been as high as #3 (and that was really a 2/3 slot, with him and Forrest essentially occupying the same ranking in my opinion "I simply placed Griffin higher because the win over the seemingly unbeatable Shogun was more incredible than Jardine beating Liddell by split decision a few months after Liddell had just been knocked out). Jardine then got knocked into next week by Wanderlei Silva, who showed that just because you lose a few fights doesn't mean you're done as a fighter by any means.

Machida continues climbing the ranks, despite everyone's prayers.

## MIDDLEWEIGHT

- 1) Anderson Silva
- 2) Dan Henderson
- 3) Paulo Filho
- 4) Matt Lindland
- 5) Robbie Lawler
- 6) Yushin Okami
- 7) Rich Franklin
- 8) Thales Leites
- 9) Nathan Marquardt
- 10) Frank Trigg

## JUSTIFICATIONS:

There is Anderson Silva and then there is everyone else. Only GSP has placed as much distance between himself and the rest of his division. He finished 1/3 of the top ten in less time than it took Rampage Jackson to beat Dan Henderson (and that's just in the past year!!!). It seems like the only question for Anderson Silva is whether he can dominate LHW the same way he's owned MW. With a promise to fight as both a MW and LHW, is there a chance we'll see a man be king of two divisions at the same time?

The only new addition to the top 10 is Thales Leites. This is another tricky one, because he beat Marquardt and I have no issue placing him above Nate for that reason. But, Thales does have the loss to Martin Kampmann. Kampmann hasn't lost since that time. The significant event I use to justify Leites in the top 10 and not Martin is that Kampmann was out of action for a long time and the Marquardt win was a darn good one. Still, I could easily have ranked the final few

guys as Kampmann, Leites, Marquardt, Trigg.

## WELTERWEIGHT

1) Georges St. Pierre

2) Jon Fitch

3) Josh Koscheck

4) Jake Shields

5) Thiago Alves

6) Matt Hughes

7) Diego Sanchez

8 ) Carlos Condit

9) Karo Parisyan

10) Matt Serra

## JUSTIFICATIONS:

Georges St. Pierre is a beast. He has made 4 men in the current top 10 look like they didn't belong in there with him. There is controversy in this division though, and that's what to do with Thiago Alves. He was in the top 10 after knocking out Parisyan. He then knocked out Hughes, so logic says he's ahead of Hughes. But, as one and all know, that fight was technically not a welterweight fight. I try to rank guys based on fights within their division because with MMA being such a diverse sport, guys fight differently at different weights. (For example, and I don't know why, Dan Henderson seems better at LHW than at MW.) I've ultimately decided to rank Alves ahead of Hughes and to pretend they fought at 170. He has fought there before and he'll fight there again and I don't really think the weight was a big factor in the outcome. I believe Alves DID injure his ankle and that prevented him from making weight more than anything else. However, Alves has previously failed a steroid test, using a substance that aids one in cutting weight, so he's had issues in the past making weight. If he doesn't make weight next time, I'll remove him from the rankings until he does.

## LIGHTWEIGHT

- 1) BJ Penn
- 2) Shinya Aoki
- 3) Gesius Calvancanti
- 4) Takanori Gomi
- 5) Tatsuya Kawajiri
- 6) Caol Uno
- 7) Vitor Riberio
- 8) Eddie Alvarez
- 9) Sean Sherk
- 10) Gilbert Melendez

## JUSTIFICATIONS:

The one division where your ranking is anything but stable. There is so much talent at 155 it's not funny -- it's freaking great! Put in perspective, I've ranked Penn, Gomi, Riberio, Calvancanti, and Aoki all as #1 since February of last year. Gilbert Melendez has gone from #3 last December to #10 today and he may drop further or rise higher depending on how he does on Saturday. Eddie Alvarez wasn't even really on the radar and now he's in the top 10 after defeating Joachim Hansen -- who drops from the top 10 for the first time in forever. Meanwhile, Caol Uno makes a great career comeback and dominates Mitsuhiro Ishida, who drops from top 5 to unranked. I feel that everyone from 1-7 deserves to be in the top 10 (and almost any combination can be justified) while I can understand others occupying the bottom three slots (Ishida, Tyson Griffin come to mind, as does Kenny Florian -- yes, KenFlo is near the top 10: little guy just keeps on winning, folks!).

I will say that I have a lot of trouble figuring out what to do with guys who fight at 160, people like Nick Diaz and KJ Noons for example. The USA is almost universally 155, except EXC which decided to just be stupid and go to 160 (well, they did it because they wanted to showcase Diaz -- thanks, boxing promoter mentality). Japan is weird. I've seen 154, 155, 160, and 168. The recent DREAM tournament seems to be a t 154, but you honestly cannot trust everything you

hear and read from Japan. For now, I'm going to try and stick with guys who fight at 155 or I BELIEVE can make 155 (hence, no Nick Diaz).

Sean Sherk's suspension is up, so he's back in the top 10. He beat Kenny Florian and Hermes Franca, both of whom had in the #10 spot at one time or another. He also gets extra credit for beating them in such an incredibly dominating fashion. I do NOT hold the steroid failure against Sherk, shockingly enough. He only failed one test, and that was against Franca, who also failed. I consider that a wash and a somewhat fair compromise given that we don't know what the guys fighting in DREAM are taking -- only that Alvarez looks really, really well.

Then there's BJ Penn. After his win over Sherk, he's #1. In his career, he defeated every lightweight he's ever currently holds wins over Gomi, Uno, and Sherk. While only the Sherk fight is recent, I haven't seen any indication that Penn has gotten worse or that Gomi has gotten THAT much better. Uno's recent resurgence is impressive, but I feel that he's only back to the level he was at when Penn defeated him. Penn also beat Joe Stevenson in January and at that time I had Stevenson ranked #10.

You can make a case that almost all of BJ's wins at 155 lbs have come against people that were ranked in the top 10 at the time Penn fought them. Din Thomas was likely top 10 when Penn knocked him out in 2:42. Caol Uno was for sure top 10 when Penn knocked him out in :11. Matt Serra was likely in the top 10 when Penn beat him. Gomi was probably top 5, if not top 3, when Penn choked him out. Duane Ludwig was actually the linear champion of the world when Penn choked him out in the first round. (Pulver was the UFC champion, left the company, and then was knocked out by Duane. Ludwig then lost to Penn.) Then, most recently, as I just said, Joe Stevenson was #10 in my rankings when Penn choked him out. Couple this with the victory over Sherk and you're talking 7 of his 10 lightweight victories have been over guys that were ranked in the top 10 when Penn fought them.

The lone LW victories that were not over top 10 fighters were his debut against Joey Gilbert, a match against Paul Creighton, and his June 2007 win over Jens Pulver (who was obviously top 10 at one time in his career). In other words, 8 of Penn's 10 lightweight wins have been over current or former top 10 guys.

Then there's talk of maybe Penn v. GSP in December. Is the race on between BJ Penn and Anderson Silva as to who will be the first man to hold titles in two divisions at the same time?

## POUND FOR POUND

General rule: success in a higher weight class counts for a lot in my book (or, guys like Machida who are pretty small for their class and could easily fight at a lower weight). Next month, I'll explain in more detail. For now, consider these food for thought. Also, normal rules about "To be the man you've gotta beat the man" do not apply.

- 1) BJ Penn
- 2) KID Yamamoto
- 3) Anderson Silva

4) Urijah Faber

5) Miguel Torres

6) Shinya Aoki

7) Lyoto Machida

8 ) Dan Henderson

9) Gilbert Melendez

10) Diego Sanchez

Mike Coughlin is the host of Five Star Radio, found right here at the new [f4wonline.com](http://www.f4wonline.com). A weekly look at all things MMA, 5SR~! is your one-stop for non-stop MMA. He hopes when he dies it comes at the hands of a grizzly bear armed with rifle and a can of tuna.  
{plug}