

Final two episodes of this season's Ultimate Fighter TV report

By Brent Wilson

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Well we get a double shot of the Ultimate Fighter to close off the season so I'll keep my opening comments brief. As a big boxing fan as well as an MMA fan I was lucky enough to take in a title unification fight between two top ten Junior Featherweights a few weeks back. Just as I predicted the incredible Celestino Caballero destroyed hometown lad Steve Molitor and sent the fans home shocked, and sad. The Ontario Commission is generally terrible so it's extremely rare to get a big fight of any kind near where I live, especially since MMA is illegal here.

One of my friends who came is big into MMA, but not really into boxing. He and I had a conversation that I heard site Overlords Bryan and Dave having on a recent Wrestling Observer Radio, namely, "Will the popularity of MMA cause it to replace boxing?" And I still don't think so, in North America boxing has already had elite athletes from lower income backgrounds stolen away from it by more lucrative team sports like basketball and football, sports that also involve less "getting punched". While MMA may certainly become very popular it will have a very tough time turning kids from inner cities into mixed martial artists for the simple fact that grappling training is prohibitively expensive. I myself have been doing BJJ since I was a child but have had to give it up upon moving to the city as it's proven too costly. Whereas boxing gyms are staples of the city and often let poorer kids train for cheap, or for free.

Take a look at the current top American boxers, if Philly guys like Steve Cunningham, or Bernard Hopkins were coming up now there's no way they could afford to grapple, Hopkins still likely would've gone to prison and ended up boxing. Same with a smalltown Rust Belt guy like Kelly Pavlik, or guys like Nate Campbell or Librado Andrade who had to work menial jobs just to get by, even after starting their boxing careers.

Around the world the topic of boxing losing popularity and losing athletes holds even less water. Boxing is red hot in Germany, much bigger than MMA in the UK, MMA is essentially nonexistent in the Caribbean, Central and South America where boxing is huge, same goes for South East Asia and Mexico. Even in Japan MMA is on a big downturn, ratings have been very disappointing for MMA since its boom and boxing has been hot following the rise of the Kameda brothers and champions like Daisuke Naito and Hozumi Hasegawa. Simply put, taking a look at the top 25 P4P boxers I can't think of any of them who would have taken up MMA rather than boxing had they been born later.

The entire boxing vs. MMA debate is nonsense anyway. Boxing and MMA aren't substitutes, if you love one you don't have to hate the other, both have many of the same elements that make combat sport so much fun. You don't have to like both, but just because you personally don't like one, or haven't given it a chance it doesn't mean that the other sport sucks, or that it's going to die. Well, that wasn't very brief at all, but it's my last chance of the season to get on my easily-scroll-pastable soapbox.

Show recap---

All the remaining semi-finals (Bader vs. Marshall, Nover vs. Roop, Soszynski vs. Vinny, and Junie vs. Escudero) will be going on tonight to allow ten days to build for the finale. They call Dave Kaplan an "early favorite" in the recap of the prior fights....that is nowhere close to being accurate

Nog thinks that Bader can outstrike Eliot Marshall on the feet but Mir feels that its a great matchup for him due to Marshalls slick ground game and Baders reliance on his wrestling and top control. There is a really basic wrestler vs. grappler for this fight and they do an adequate job of getting this story across to the viewer. Bader was a two-time All-American wrestler at Arizona State and an Arizona HS champion. In his fights on the show and off Bader has relied on his wrestling to a perfect record, being able to take down his opponents whenever he wants and ground and pound from there, he's shown decent submissions, but only against guys he's overmatched with size and strength. Bader's striking leaves a lot to be desired currently as he's never really had to use it yet. Bader has beaten Kyle Kingsbury by arm triangle submission and Tom Lawlor by KO to this point.

Eliot Marshall is a BJJ black belt and former LHW champion in Colorados Ring of Fire promotion. Marshalls technique is too good for Bader too just overpower him to a submission. Marshall is slick on the ground but in MMA has largely used his excellent jiu-jitsu positionally, mainly operating station to station and then looking to strike or for a submission once in mount where he has shown a really good base. Marshall will probably need to rely on sweeps for a chance to win as he will almost certainly get taken down and hasn't shown to be too too dangerous with subs off his back in ROF or on the show. Marshall has lost to Karn Grigoryan by an unjust decision and beaten Shane Primm by rear naked choke.

Ryan Bader (7-0) vs. Eliot Marshall (5-1)

Round One

Both guys start off with some tentative strikes, Marshall looks to be much bigger than Bader but Bader is staying out of range nicely. A head kick from Marshall is mostly blocked by Bader. Bader still looks committed to staying back, out of range until he wants to shoot, Marshall is responding by picking up the kicks, landing two inside leg and a body kick. Bader leaps in but Marshall steps straight back out of range of the strikes and almost catches a Bader kick. Mir calls for a 1-3 (jab, lead left) but Marshall instead lands a 1-2 with the straight right landing home. Bader with a straight right of his own, Mir thinks Bader is dropping his hands. Both guys are really telegraphing when they're going to step in so in turn both guys are able to step away and avoid easily. It'd be nice to see them step in and counter in the pocket rather than move straight back though.

Bader catches a Marshall leg kick and easily dumps him to the mat ending up in his full guard. Marshall locks on an overhook on Baders right arm straight away, he gives it up but Bader is keeping his hands on the mat so that is a great strategy. Bader moves Marshall up against the fence. The final two minutes play out with Bader lying flat with his head on Marshalls chest and occasionally throwing and not landing short shots. The round ends with Bader on top.

Sigh...I really don't want to give Bader this round, he didn't try to pass and he didn't really strike, Marshall was winning on the feet but just barely. I'm still giving it to Bader 10-9 almost entirely because that's what I think the judges will do.

Round Two

Neither guy is setting up their power shots at all still. Both are standing on the outside, stepping in to throw and landing nothing as their opponent just steps away. Marshall throws another body kick, but it gets caught and he goes down again putting Bader in his open guard. Bader again looks to put Marshall against the cage, Bader briefly passes to half but Marshall regains full guard easily. Marshall sits up to his left and looks to turn an overhook into an omoplata but can't pull it across Baders head, so he lets it go. Bader lands a hard right elbow, his first meaningful strike from the top. Marshall again locks on an overhook and Bader has to lift Marshall up a little off the ground and slam him to free himself. Marshall turns to the left and it sort of looks like he's wants to try a kimura but Bader had good posture and wasn't close enough at this point. This just opened Marshall up to a hammerfist or two, Ref Josh Rosenthal stands them up but that move may show Marshall knows he needs to start going for stuff to turn the fight around.

Bader looks tired but rushes forward right away and dumps Marshall down again, this time grabbing half-guard, Marshall gets full guard back again but Bader appears content to ride the fight out. Bader again does nothing until Marshall gets desperate again and looks to scramble up opening himself up to more shots.

This round was more clearly Baders. Still for the most part he did barely more than nothing, I was looking hard for ways to give this round to Marshall but he did barely less than barely more than nothing. When he was looking for offense off his back it wasn't set up and just opened him up to take damage, something Bader wasn't able to create on his own.

Round Three? The judges must've given the first to Marshall. Honestly, I'm surprised but glad, judges may be slowly learning that winning the fight doesn't always equal being on top. Bader hasn't had to work hard for takedowns at all so I imagine we'll see more of that in the third.

Round Three

Neither guy lands on the feet, but this time its Marshall who grabs a Bader kick, it makes no difference as Bader ducks down, changes levels and again Marshall offers no resistance and is dumped down with a double leg. Bader presses Marshall to the cage once again, Marshall digs his hips up, possibly looking for butterfly guard for a sweep opportunity. Wait, nope, he curls his arm under Baders left knee and looks to roll for a kneebar. Bader holds the cage preventing Marshall from rolling Bader enough to lock both legs over Baders left to get enough leverage for the submission, Bader moves Marshall back to full guard. Josh Rosenthal stands them up again. Bader with a leg kick, overhand right, and another takedown attempt that is easily finished. Marshall has really shown no attempts at sprawling at all. Once down Marshall sits up and locks onto Baders right arm looking for a keylock, Bader lifts up trying to free himself and Marshall gives it up.

After some more Bader lying on top Rosenthal stands the pair up with 1:16 left on the clock. Bader ducks a head kick pulls Marshalls legs together and again Marshall goes onto his back. Bader again passes to half-guard and this time is able to maintain it for more than a few seconds, Bader lands some elbows as the fight ends.

I wussed out and gave Bader the first after my gut said Marshall won it.....and I'm doing it again, Baders round 10-9. Bader did very very little again, but Marshall didn't do enough from the bottom to make the decision unjust, had Marshall shown any takedown defense at all, or the ability to land with more than kicks that led to him getting taken down it very easily could've been a different fight. But he didn't so he lost. Dana felt that Marshall didn't take any risks...that's

somewhat true, but whenever he did he ate damage right away, that was the real only way Bader was able to land when Marshall would open himself up.

Marshall is gracious in defeat and admits that Bader was the better man, even if it was Lay and Pray.

The second fight of the night will be Team Nogs Phillipe Nover against Mirs George Roop in a lightweight semi-final.

The story the show presents for this fight is that Nover is the favorite, well-rounded and a real threat. Roop is presented as a tough guy with big heart, and that he'll need it.

And again that's not an unfair representation of the truth. Nover admits that Roop being 6'1" gives him a little pause but thinks he's going to take Roop down, take his back and finish with a rear naked choke, Nog builds up Novers striking as well. Roop talks about how his right hand is still bothering him, and his right eye is really swollen as well. In his last fight with the hurt hand Roop relied almost entirely on his jab and left low kick, right high kick. But that was against John Polakowski who can't strike at range or wrestle like Nover can.

Roop is a former champion at Rage in the Cage and has shown great gameplanning throughout his career, he uses his length well on the feet to jab and kick from the outside and also on the ground to lock up opponents and stall from the bottom. In both his victories on the show he's used gameplanning and matchups against two of the weaker guys on the show, keeping it standing against BJJ stud Roli Delgado, and fighting from the outside and on-top against limited brawler Polakowski, winning both by decision.

That will be much tougher against the well-rounded Nover who doesn't have a clear weakness like the other guys, and especially with a busted up power hand. Both Novers fights on the show have ended very similarly against both Joe Duarte and Dave Kaplan Nover ended up on top pounded them with hard elbows, made them turn their backs, or scramble foolishly to get away from the onslaught and ended matters with a rear naked choke. In his fights outside the show Nover has shown to be a quick finisher as well as he meshes his hard strikes with his positioning and submission setups fluidly.

Phillipe Nover (5-0-1) vs. George Roop (8-3)

Round One

Nover is very aggressive to start landing hard overhand rights that loop completely around Roops defenses knocking him backwards. With Roop backpedaling and firing wild shots back Nover takes advantage and takes his off-balance opponent down. Nover is on top in full guard but easily passes to half. Roop wallwalks first to regain guard then to push off of to sweep and end up on top. Nover grabbed an arm during the sweep and is framing a kimura. Roop locks his hands together to defend but Nover actually brings his leg inbetween Roops arms to break the grip. Nover is looking to use it to sweep as he posts up on one arm and tries to push Roop backwards onto his back, Roop hangs strong but Nover still has his arm. Nover starts to crank it and is able to pull it behind Roops back, from the full guard this is used as a sweep, Roop needs to roll over to relieve the pressure on his shoulder. Wow! As Roop tries to roll Nover locks his leg over Roops preventing him from making it over. Roop is now on his back with his legs bent up over his head and Nover cranking his arm in a kimura, Roop needed to use his free arm to free his legs to save his arm and give up the sweep but instead tried to throw a behind the back punch.....somehow that failed and Nover gets a really pretty and unique kimura finish in the first round.

While Roop made it to the semifinals mainly due to an easy draw he's still a tough guy and Nover deserves props for rolling right over him. Novers fluid game was clear in this fight, he was able to go right from power punching to takedown position, and once on the ground was able to quickly grab a submission and not let it go until he finished with it.

First up is Team Mir and Team Quest Temecula teammates Krzysztof Soszynski against Vinny Magalhaes...ooh they actually mention their shared Temecula background. Really no build up for this fight, I guess to save more time for Junies breakdown later on.

Soszynski is a pretty good striker with lots of experience fighting, but not necessarily beating top guys, both in the IFL and with HDNet Fights. He also has a knack for being in really wacky fights, with opponents refusing to get up from butt scoots, and he seems to get kneed in the groin in every single fight. Vinny has some decent knees to the body so hopefully we'll get one that strays to the cup for old times sake. Soszynski so far beat up a guy with no stand up in Mike Stewart, and submitted a guy with no jiu jitsu in Kyle Kingsbury. Kingsbury was able to get double underhooks and get on top with a little work, if Vinny is able to do that Soszynski could be in some trouble,

Vinny Magalhaes is a black belt and world champion in BJJ but hasn't had the smoothest transition to MMA. When fighting guys well below his skill level he's able to win easily, racking up points with hard right kicks and his great ground game, he's done so so far on the show against Lance Evans and Jules Bruchez, winning by TKO and armbar without too much trouble. Against guys who can strike and wrestle he has trouble as his standup on the whole and defense is poor, and he can't really wrestle to get the fight to the ground, he had to pull guard against Bruchez. Add to this that his

conditioning is suspect and you can see why he's 2-2 with the ground skills he has. Against good fighters Vinny gets hit, gets tired, and can't do anything about it, so he gives up and loses. Soszynski is a good fighter.

Krzysztof Soszynski (15-8-1) vs. Vinny Magalhaes (2-2)

Round One

Soszynski shows right away he doesn't respect Vinny's hand or takedowns as he walks in real close with wide, high hands. It's Soszynski though that must step away from strikes early, it's surprising with how close both are how little is landing. A left from Soszynski lands on a covered up Vinny, Vinny presses forward, Soszynski looks for a Thai plumb and Vinny leaps to pull guard. Vinny locks up rubber guard and uses the closeness it presents to smother Soszynski and strike from the bottom. Soszynski is trying to stick both arms and shoulders inside Vinnys leg to create space to free himself and to cover up from the strikes, it does however open him up to Vinny grabbing an arm and looking to finish. Soszynski is successful in freeing himself and stands over Vinny. Cecil Peoples sighting in the background. Soszynski steps away and lets Vinny stand. Soszynski is setting up a little further out now and lands a nice left. Vinny loads up and lands one of the hard right body kicks he loves to throw. Soszynski lands another left and over the next minute and a half lands nine straight hard inside leg kicks with Vinny offering little back to stop him. Vinny throws another right body kick, rushes in, misses a wild overhand right and flops to his back. He pops back up but eats a jab as he does so which knocks Vinny off balance. Vinny eats another jab as he throws a body kick which puts him off balance again. From the ground he pops up and looks for a takedown but Soszynski easily grabs double underhooks to stop it, Vinny has to pull guard again.

Vinny quickly looks to rubber guard again but this time looks for the omoplata, he has it, as well as the opportunity for a reverse armbar a la Dustin Hazelett. Soszynski rolls over but Vinny has his legs locked over Soszynskis head and Soszynski rolls into perfect position for a straight armbar which Vinny easily finishes.

Despite being very predictable and with right side heavy offense and no takedowns Vinny is through to the finals. In both his last two fights he pulled guard to get the fight to the ground, threatened with rubber guard and then switched to an armbar to finish matters. Against a guy who can strike and defend subs he's going to get destroyed...but Ryan Bader isn't really that guy. This could be an exact repeat of the Dollaway-Sadollah final, I don't know, now with guys on the show having such clear limitations a lot depends on the matchups people receive on their way through. Like Sadollah Vinny has a real chance to win the show, but is inexperienced and has clear holes so it's tough to cast him as a can't miss prospect.

While training Junie is still complaining about the quality of training he is receiving. He feels he's gotten worse since coming to the house and away from his team. Junie feels he is getting caught in submissions and positions he wouldn't normally in training due to this. Junie also says he doesn't want to fight anymore and that maybe Shane Nelson should take his place. Frank Mir doesn't argue with him and says that if Junie doesn't want to fight that's fine, he'll put someone in there who does. Back at the house on the back porch the guys are discussing the LHW matchup. Vinny and Junie feel that if the fight goes to the ground Vinny will tap Bader pretty easily, Junie also states that even Nog doesn't have the ground skills of Vinny. No Vinny, why must we drudge up that again?

Anyway, Shane Primm defends his teammates and after Junie says that he'll be the most successful guy from the show regardless of what happens on the show itself, Primm responds that Junie needs to stop talking and to "show him something". Junie shows a close up of a glass by chucking it at him. The glass explodes on Primms chest and hands, Junie then steps towards the seated Primm and throws three punches, Primm brushes himself off, gets up and gets into a boxers stance but the others pull Junie away.

Dana comes to the house and has a heart to heart with Junie. Dana feels that Junie pulled this latest stunt to try and get himself kicked off the show to defend himself from the possible failure of losing. Junie agrees somewhat, Dana decides he'll talk with the rest of the guys to see if they think Junie should stay. Dana realizes the favoritism he's showing Junie as opposed to past guys who've messed up but argues that he's not favoring Junie.... Whatever you say Dana, I'm sure the fact that Junie can fight a little bit and has the chance to be marketable has nothing at all to do with the fact you're keeping him on and the fact you booted scrubs like Allan Berube, Marlon Sims, and Noah Thomas. (Although to be fair Thomas looked really good winning the bantamweight title in his last fight in TKO.)

So instead of talking to them and getting their opinions Dana talks to them, telling them how Junie should stay. At that point he asks them and Efrain if Junie should stay...he then asks Junie if he wants to stay and make lots of money and be a champion someday possibly. Geez....leading the witness your honor, X2.

So the grudge match is on Efrain Escudero vs. Junie Browning, it's been building since Efrain subbed Junie in the tryouts, then onto when Junie got drunk and in Efrains face, and up to when Junie hopped the fence after Efrains win over Shane Nelson by mounted triangle and beyond.

Despite all his antics Junie is a really tough and scrappy kid. He has decent standup and power with both hands and

legs. And on the ground Junie has decent submission skills as well although he hasn't shown it on the show. Junie has beaten Jose Aguillar by TKO and Roli Delgado by a lackluster decision where he gassed early.

Like Ryan Bader Efrain Escudero was a Arizona HS champion, and a college All-American, although Escuderos came at Junior College. Escudero has synthesized that wrestling with a good submission game nicely. Escudero uses strikes to push himself into advantageous position and from there looks to finish with submissions. Escudero used this jiu-jitsu for a beautiful setup and finish versus Shane Nelson and was also able to sub black belt Ido Pariente in the prelims, Escuderos sub game is very varied with triangles, D'Arce chokes, and calf slicers all par for the course.

Junie Browning (2-0) vs. Efrain Escudero (10-0)

Round One

The two trade inside leg kicks to open things up, Junie pumps a nice jab that comes up just short. Junie pumps another jab and follows it with a lead left that does loop and land, Efrain answers with another inside leg kick. Junie tries to lead with a body shot but Efrain does a beautiful job countering with a left of his own to the head. Now Efrain ducks a Junie haymaker and goes right for the takedown, excellent use of counters back to back by Efrain. Junie looks to sit up right away but Efrain has a front headlock to keep him down, it ends up with Efrain standing above Junie on the ground. Junie is able to kick off and back to his feet after a few punches. Junie with an inside leg kick, Efrain again counters, this time a jab with one of his own, did I mention I love counterpunching? The two clinch up and Junie looks for the takedown against the cage, Junie gets one leg up but Efrain does a great job defending, a really wide base, pushing Junies head down, perfect technique and balance, all the while pumping elbows into Junies head as well. The two trade knees against the fence, Junie briefly looks for another takedown but it's not there for him. Efrain is handfighting really well as well keeping Junie from getting underhooks.

The two separate and Junie looks a bit tired from the attempts to get Efrain down. Junie is the more active fighter though, throwing lots of pawing kicks, a double kick to the body, nothing hard just landing lots of strikes. Efrain counters a headkick with an overhand right, and is timing Junies jab to throw a left overtop of it. The two stand and trade to close the round, Efrain is really focused on counterstriking to the detriment of throwing a lot of strikes as the round ends.

I'm giving it to Efrain, 10-9 for landing the clean effective strikes while also controlling where the fight has ended up. Efrain did a lot of things very well but it didn't all add up to a clear round win as he didn't strike enough and mainly focused on countering or neutralizing what Junie offered. When Junie stands on the outside and focuses on kicking Efrain resorts to waiting and that's where Junie found success in the round.

Round Two

Junie throws an inside leg, spinning backfist combo that comes up short as the round starts. Efrain lands a left, Junie shoots in again, but again is stuffed, Efrain throws two knees for good measure on the way out. Mir wants Junie to throw three strike combos, but Efrain is countering and landing harder strikes before Junie can throw the second or third strike and get into a rhythm. Hard right lands for Junie. Now a hard left lands for Junie, Efrain is there to be hit if Junie can find him. Two inside leg kicks from Efrain, and then the shot attempt, Efrain scoops a leg and Junie does not have the balance to get himself back to the cage on one leg and ends up on his back. Efrain tosses a leg to the side and passes to half right away. Efrain is landing elbows to Junies body and legs looking for an opening to pass, Junie is trying to lock Efrain up to get the fight stood up, Junie looks to the ref and raises his hands to try and get the fight stood up as well. Efrain is also digging his forearm into Junies neck really well to try and free up some space to pass. Junie looks to sit up to try and scramble but as soon as he does Efrain threatens with the D'Arce choke setup. It's tough to see if it's under the neck from the current camera angle. Well...it must've been as Junie taps out with 1:30 remaining in Round Two.

Junie storms off as Team Nog celebrates putting three guys through to the Finals. Mir felt that Junie wasn't listening at all and wondered why he went for the shot. Mir also feels that Junie quit and gave Efrain the choke to end things. Nog was worried about Efrain standing with Junie but that he did really well. Junie says he's done with fighting for good, that if he can't beat Efrain he can't beat anyone in the UFC so that there's no point.

Mir agreed to let Nog shave his head if Nogs guys all got through, so Mir went bald to end things off, and it turns out Junie changed his mind and will fight again.

So there we have it, the finals will have Phillipe Nover against Efrain Escudero at Lightweight, and Vinny Magalhaes against Ryan Bader at Light Heavyweight.

Anyway, if you somehow made it through this massive wall of text thanks for reading.

