BELLATOR is a leading global MMA promotion featuring many of the best athletes in the world. Under the direction of veteran fight promoter Scott Coker, BELLATOR events take place in major cities around the world and can be seen on television in over 160 countries to an available audience of over one billion people. In the United States, BELLATOR events can be seen on SHOWTIME, while in The U.K. fans can watch on BBC iPlayer. BELLATOR MMA also has a dedicated channel on Pluto TV, which launched in 2020.

BELLATOR is comprised of an executive team that includes top industry professionals in television production, live events, fighter development/relations, sponsorship, international licensing, marketing, advertising and public relations. BELLATOR is based in Hollywood, Calif. and owned by entertainment giant ViacomCBS, home to the world’s premier entertainment brands that connect with audiences through compelling content across television, motion picture, online and mobile platforms.

In June of 2015, BELLATOR 138 broke franchise records for ratings, peaking at more than 2.9 million viewers, making it one of the most watched MMA events on cable television in 2015. At BELLATOR 170 in January 2017, 2.2 million viewers tuned in for Tito Ortiz’s first-round submission victory over Chael Sonnen, which marked the most watched BELLATOR fight on Spike TV in nearly a year. Later that same year, BELLATOR hosted its second pay-per-view ever at Madison Square Garden in New York, a card that featured Chael Sonnen defeating Wanderlei Silva, Matt Mitrione besting Fedor Emelianenko and Ryan Bader capturing the light heavyweight title from Phil Davis.

BELLATOR hosted an eight-man Heavyweight World Grand Prix in 2018, where Ryan Bader emerged victorious becoming the promotion’s first two-division champion. Following the success of that initial tournament, BELLATOR held the Welterweight World Grand Prix in 2019, which was won by Douglas Lima. A 16-man Featherweight World Grand Prix is set to culminate later this summer with Featherweight World Champion Patricio Pitbull taking on undefeated phenom A.J. McKee. Also currently in progress is the 2021 Light Heavyweight World Grand Prix, which is currently in the semi-final stage, leaving matchups between divisional kingpin Vadim Nemkov and Anthony “Rumble” Johnson as well as Ryan Bader and Corey Anderson.

The BELLATOR MMA European Series was launched in early 2019, and airs exclusively on the BBC Network in the UK. In addition to numerous cities throughout the UK, the series has held live events in Ireland, Italy and France.

To date, BELLATOR has hosted over 260 live events in eight countries and 34 states.
ABOUT

SCOTT
COKER

Hired by Viacom and Spike TV in June of 2014, Scott Coker began his tenure as BELLATOR President at BELLATOR 122 on July 25. With more than 30 years promoting martial arts events, Coker is well known throughout the MMA industry as the founder and former CEO of Strikeforce MMA.

His career in combat sports began as a student of acclaimed martial artist, actor and fight choreographer Ernie Reyes Sr. Coker would go on to become a seventh degree Taekwondo black belt and was an original member of Reyes’ West Coast Demonstration Team.

In March 1985, Coker promoted his first fight card, serving as the San Jose promoter for the Professional Karate Association (PKA), a regulatory body for kickboxing and karate competitions. Coker helped form the International Sports Karate Association (ISKA) in 1986 and served as a director of ISKA. He later headed K-1 USA, an extension of the extremely popular Japan-based K-1 kickboxing promotion.

In 1992, Coker founded Strikeforce Kickboxing and struck a crucial deal with ESPN to air some of its events. Strikeforce evolved into a mixed martial arts promotion in 2006, and its first MMA event featuring a fight between Frank Shamrock and Cesar Gracie drew an astounding crowd of over 18,000 at the HP Pavilion in San Jose. Notably, the show also served as the first regulated MMA event in California.

In another historic moment, Strikeforce later promoted Gina Carano vs. Cris “Cyborg” in San Jose on August 15, 2009, marking the first time two women headlined a major MMA event.

In April 2008, Coker increased Strikeforce’s media presence by striking a deal with NBC to air the half-hour highlight program, Strikeforce on NBC, hosted by Ken Shamrock and Lon McEachern. In 2009, Coker completed an agreement with Pro Elite, Inc. to acquire the properties of the now-defunct Elite XC MMA promotion. The deal included the video library and fighter contracts, as well as the agreement between Strikeforce, CBS and Showtime Networks to produce several events per year. In 2011, Coker sold Strikeforce to the UFC in a landmark deal.


Coker’s presence provided BELLATOR with immediate results through his signature tent-pole live events, as well as his focus on attracting the sport’s top free agents, development of homegrown prospects and expansion into numerous international markets. Under his direction, the promotion continues to have a home in the ViacomCBS family on SHOWTIME.
BANTAMWEIGHT
SERGIO PETTIS
RECORD: 21 - 5
BORN: 08 - 18 -1993
HEIGHT: 5' 6"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA
WEIGHT CLASS: 135 lb

FEATHERWEIGHT & LIGHTWEIGHT
PATRICIO ‘PITBULL’ FREIRE
RECORD: 32 - 4
BORN: 07 - 07 - 1987
HEIGHT: 5' 8"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil
WEIGHT CLASS: 145 lb & 155 lb

FEATHERWEIGHT (W)
CRIS ‘CYBORG’ JUSTINO
RECORD: 24 - 2
BORN: 07 - 09 - 1985
HEIGHT: 5' 8"
FIGHTING OUT OF: San Diego, California, USA
WEIGHT CLASS: 145 lb

FLYWEIGHT (W)
JULIANA VELASQUEZ
RECORD: 11 - 0
BORN: 10 - 19 -1986
HEIGHT: 5' 6"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
WEIGHT CLASS: 125 lb

RECORD: 20 - 18 -1993
HEIGHT: 5' 6"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA
WEIGHT CLASS: 135 lb

RECORD: 32 - 4
BORN: 07 - 07 - 1987
HEIGHT: 5' 8"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil
WEIGHT CLASS: 145 lb & 155 lb

RECORD: 24 - 2
BORN: 07 - 09 - 1985
HEIGHT: 5' 8"
FIGHTING OUT OF: San Diego, California, USA
WEIGHT CLASS: 145 lb
WELTERWEIGHT

DOUGLAS
"THE PHENOM"
LIMA

RECORD: 32 - 8
BORN: 01 - 05 - 1988
HEIGHT: 6' 1"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Atlanta, Georgia, USA
WEIGHT CLASS: 170 lb

MIDDLEWEIGHT

GEGARD
MOUSASI

RECORD: 47 - 7 - 2
BORN: 08 - 01 - 1985
HEIGHT: 6' 2"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Leiden, South Holland, Netherlands
WEIGHT CLASS: 185 lb

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT

VADIM
NEMKOV

RECORD: 14 - 2
BORN: 06 - 20 - 1992
HEIGHT: 6' 0"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Stary Oskol, Belgorod Oblast, Russia
WEIGHT CLASS: 205 lb

HEAVYWEIGHT

RYAN
"DARTH"
BADER

RECORD: 28 - 6
BORN: 06 - 07 - 1983
HEIGHT: 6' 2"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Tempe, Arizona, USA
WEIGHT CLASS: 265 lb
SUBMISSION of the YEAR
AJ MCKEE
defeats DARION CALDWELL
SUBMISSION: NECK CRANK
ROUND 1 | 1:11
BELLATOR 253
11 - 19 - 2020

KNOCKOUT of the YEAR
AARON PICO
defeats JOHN DE JESUS
KNOCKOUT: PUNCH
ROUND 2 | 4:12
BELLATOR 252
11 - 12 - 2020

FIGHT of the YEAR
JUAN ARCHULETA
defeats PATCHY MIX
DECISION: UNANIMOUS
BELLATOR 246
09 - 12 - 2020
LOS ANGELES (AP) — The BELLATOR mixed martial arts promotion is moving to Showtime.

BELLATOR will be televised exclusively on the premium cable network under terms of a new agreement announced Tuesday. Both BELLATOR and Showtime are owned by ViacomCBS.

The telecast deal begins in April with the first in a series of Friday night events on Showtime, during which the promotion will launch a light heavyweight Grand Prix tournament.

BELLATOR 255 on April 2 will be headlined by a featherweight title fight between Patricio Freire and Emmanuel Sanchez.

BELLATOR has staged its shows at a casino in Uncasville, Connecticut, since its return in July 2020 amid the coronavirus pandemic. BELLATOR aired its main events on CBS Sports Network since last September. Before that, the promotion was on the DAZN streaming service, frustrating many fans.

BELLATOR President Scott Coker has a lengthy history with Showtime. The defunct Strikeforce promotion aired its fights on Showtime from 2007-13 while Coker ran that promotion before the UFC bought it.

Showtime is doubling down on its commitment to combat sports with plans to continue its extensive boxing presentations on Saturday nights. Showtime has become the dominant cable network in the fight game after HBO dropped boxing in 2018.

The UFC moved exclusively to ESPN in 2019.

Coker said BELLATOR’s eight-man light heavyweight Grand Prix will include an opening-round matchup former UFC contenders Yoel Romero and Anthony “Rumble” Johnson in their BELLATOR debuts on April 16. Ryan Bader and Lyoto Machida will meet April 9 on the other side of the tournament bracket.
Showtime will be the “exclusive home for BELLATOR live events” in a new partnership between the premium cable net and the ViacomCBS-owned fight promotion, according to Danny Segura of MMA JUNKIE. The partnership kicks off Friday, April 2, with BELLATOR 255: Showtime Sports President Stephen Espinoza. “We have a long history with MMA that goes back for 15 years. The time just felt right to combine forces. BELLATOR has matured and elevated itself at a point where it now belongs in premium television.” Segura noted BELLATOR had been “streaming their preliminary fights on YouTube and their main cards on CBS Sports Network” -- a deal that began in September with BELLATOR 249. Prior to that, the promotion was streaming fights on DAZN (MMAJUNKIE.com, 2/9). DEADLINE’s Dade Hayes noted three straight Friday primetime BELLATOR cards in April, originating from Mohegan Sun Arena in Connecticut. “will inaugurate the relationship.”

Plans call for Showtime to “air up to two BELLATOR events per month” for the rest of ’21. Preliminary undercard matchups “will stream for free on YouTube,” and Showtime is “offering new subscribers a promotional rate for Showtime’s OTT streaming service for $5 a month (more than half off) for the next six months.” Viacom originally bought a majority stake in BELLATOR in ‘11 after “years of licensing rights to air its matches” (DEADLINE.com, 2/9).
ViacomCBS-owned fight circuit BELLATOR MMA will have its matches air on corporate cousin Showtime as the premium network continues to ramp up its investment in ring sports.

On three straight Fridays in April, primetime BELLATOR matches originating from Mohegan Sun Arena in southeastern Connecticut will inaugurate the relationship. The arena is part of a casino complex that has gradually reopened parts of its footprint with safety restrictions. It recently staged "bubble"-style NCAA college basketball games, a concept considered by many sports stakeholders during the coronavirus pandemic. Together, BELLATOR MMA and Showtime have held more than 20 live events at Mohegan Sun since July 2020.

Viacom, which merged with CBS in December 2019, originally bought a majority stake in BELLATOR in 2011 after years of licensing rights to air its matches. In recent years, BELLATOR aired on various cable networks, including Spike (which then rebranded as the Paramount Network) and CBS Sports Network.

Showtime has recently increased its investment in boxing, a sport it has aired since 1986, at a time when longtime rival HBO stepped out of the ring. Mixed martial arts has demonstrated appeal among younger viewers. While BELLATOR does not quite have the same profile as the UFC, its matches have maintained a steady following. The new agreement will make Showtime the "preeminent home of premier combat sports in America." Stephen Espinosa, the network's president of sports and event programming, said in a press release: "We are excited to build on what BELLATOR MMA has created and to amplify the momentum they've gained over the last several years."

Fighters and executives took part in an announcement of the partnership this afternoon, outlining schedules and cards for upcoming tournaments through the next few months. Plans call for Showtime to air up to two BELLATOR events per month for the rest of 2021. Preliminary undercard matchups will stream for free on YouTube and Showtime is offering new subscribers a promotional rate for Showtime's OTT streaming service for $5 a month (more than half off) for the next six months.

BELLATOR MMA President Scott Coker pointed to past collaborations with Showtime: "We have done things together that have shaped the sport of mixed martial arts that you see today," he said. "But what's really exciting about this news is that everything we have already accomplished is just the beginning."
There will be a new tournament and a new network for BELLATOR MMA this year. BELLATOR announced Tuesday that its new exclusive home for events will be Showtime, with fights on Friday nights beginning April 2. The events will air live across the country.

"BELLATOR has matured and elevated itself to a point where it now belongs on a premium television network," Showtime’s Stephen Espinoza said.

Showtime and BELLATOR are both owned by parent company ViacomCBS.

BELLATOR will complete its featherweight grand prix, with champion Patricio Pitbull Freire facing Emmanuel Sanchez in the remaining semifinal on April 2. The winner will face A.J. McKee for the BELLATOR title, the grand prix title and $1 million.

BELLATOR also announced a light heavyweight grand prix, which showcases a number of the promotion’s bigger free-agent signings in the past year. The fights are:
- Corey Anderson vs. Dovletdzhan Yagshimuradov
- Ryan Bader vs. Lyoto Machida
- Anthony Johnson vs. Yoel Romero
- Vadim Nemkov vs. Phil Davis

Anderson and Yagshimuradov will kick off the tournament on April 9, as will Bader and Machida. The other quarterfinals will take place on April 16, with the semifinals scheduled for July and the final for October.
The 2021 schedule for BELLATOR MMA kicks off in a big way this April with the promotion announcing a slate of big events which will air exclusively on Showtime, marking the company’s debut on the network. The move begins with three consecutive Friday night fight cards beginning April 2. Showtime has a long history of airing mixed martial arts events on its platform, beginning with EliteXC before a lengthy history with Strikeforce -- the promotion formerly headed up by current BELLATOR president Scott Coker.

“Everyone in this industry knows the history that I have with Showtime. We have done things together that have truly shaped the sport of mixed martial arts that you see today,” Coker said. “But what’s really exciting about this news is that everything we have already accomplished is just the beginning. 2021 marks a new era for BELLATOR MMA. With our new home at Showtime, we are going to take this brand to a new level, and you are going to see us build upon the foundation that we have already set throughout my time with BELLATOR.”

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BELLATOR 256 and 257, which take place on Friday, April 9 and Friday, April 16, respectively, will feature the beginning of the much-anticipated eight-man BELLATOR Light Heavyweight World Grand Prix -- a tournament that includes two high-profile BELLATOR signings in former UFC title challengers Yoel Romero and Anthony “Rumble” Johnson.

Romero was a high-profile cut by the UFC in late 2020, one fight after a close decision loss in a bid for Israel Adesanya’s middleweight championship. He challenged for the middleweight title three times in his final five fights for the UFC, with a fourth scheduled championship opportunity ultimately not contested for the title after Romero missed weight.

Johnson will be fighting for the first time since April 2017, ending a lengthy retirement from active competition after his second stint with the UFC. Like Romero, Johnson’s most recent fight was a chance at UFC gold, losing a battle for the light heavyweight championship against then-champion Daniel Cormier.

The main event of the BELLATOR 257 card boasts reigning light heavyweight champion Vadim Nemkov putting his title up for grabs against former champion Phil Davis.
One week prior at BELLATOR 256 on April 9, the Light Heavyweight World Grand Prix kicks off with former 205-pound champion -- and reigning heavyweight champion -- Ryan Bader battling Lyoto Machida in the main event. This is a rematch of their 2012 encounter under the UFC banner which saw Machida emerge victorious via second-round KO. The co-main event, also a tournament bout, features BELLATOR newcomer Corey Anderson -- fresh off a promotional debut win in November -- versus Davletdzhan Yagshimuradov.

BELLATOR 256 and 257, which take place on Friday, April 9 and Friday, April 16, respectively, will feature the beginning of the much-anticipated eight-man BELLATOR Light Heavyweight World Grand Prix. The entirety of the Showtime slate kicks off on Friday, April 2 with the BELLATOR 255 event. The main event witnesses Patricio Pitbull defending his BELLATOR featherweight championship against Emmanuel Sanchez in the semifinals of the Featherweight World Grand Prix. The winner will advance to the finals as champion to battle AJ McKee, who secured his spot in the finals with a submission victory over Darrion Caldwell this past November.

The upcoming events are scheduled to take place at the Mohegan Sun Arena in Uncasville, Connecticut, as will future cards which are planned to feature middleweight champion Gegard Mousasi, welterweight champion Douglas Lima, bantamweight champion Juan Archuleta and women's flyweight champion Juliana Velasquez.
As BELLATOR prepares to start their 2021 slate of events on new broadcast partner Showtime, the promotion is also introducing a new divisional ranking system. The system, which will launch some time ahead of BELLATOR 255 on April 2, will rank fighters across seven men’s and two women’s weight classes. In addition, there will be men’s and women’s top 10 pound-for-pound lists.

The rankings will be compiled based on the votes of “reputable members of the MMA media.” Ballots will be submitted following the conclusion of every BELLATOR event. Tabulation of all submitted ballots will be handled by Combat Registry.

Top 10 rankings, with a champion slot sitting atop, will exist for heavyweight, light heavyweight, middleweight, welterweight, lightweight, featherweight, bantamweight, women’s featherweight and women’s flyweight.

BELLATOR will exclusively determine eligible fighters as well as what weight classes they are eligible in based on the following criteria:

- A fighter may not be ranked until they have completed one fight in the BELLATOR cage on a current contract. Fighters who previously fought in the promotion but left to fight elsewhere before eventually returning will not be automatically ranked, requiring one fight on their current term to become eligible.
- After a period of 15 months of inactivity, fighters will be removed from the rankings.
- Fighters may be ranked in two weight classes once they have competed in both divisions. The inactivity rule applies, with a period of 15 months of inactivity in a division resulting in the removal of eligibility for that weight class.
- A fighter participating in a Grand Prix tournament will not be considered inactive in other divisions in which they are ranked.
- A fighter serving a suspension by a regulating body for non-medical reasons for a period of greater than six months will result in removal from ranking eligibility.

BELLATOR’s 2021 schedule kicks off with featherweight champion Patricio Pitbull and Emmanuel Sanchez battling for the belt and a trip to the finals in the Featherweight World Grand Prix in the main event of BELLATOR 255. BELLATOR 256 and 257 will feature the start of the Light Heavyweight Grand Prix with all four first round bouts spread across the two events.
Scott Coker is known for his work building Strikeforce, the promotion he founded in 1985 and sold to UFC in 2011. A decade later, Coker is creating his next masterpiece. As president of BELLATOR, he is developing a top-tier MMA promotion, providing a home for established fighters and emerging stars.

BELLATOR’s new broadcast deal with Showtime is a key factor in its continued growth. (BELLATOR and Showtime are both owned by ViacomCBS.) On Friday night, for the third straight week, a slate of live fights will air as part of BELLATOR 257, a card headlined by a light heavyweight bout pitting Phil Davis against BELLATOR light heavyweight champion Vadim Nemkov. This is a rematch of their November 2018 fight, which Nemkov claimed by split decision. It is also part of the BELLATOR Light Heavyweight World Grand Prix Tournament, where Ryan Bader has already advanced.

Before BELLATOR 257, Coker spoke with Sports Illustrated, discussing the build of the BELLATOR roster, Fedor Emelianenko’s next bout, and the potential of airing a special event on CBS.

Sports Illustrated: As evident in your work with Strikeforce, the promotion he founded in 1985 and sold to UFC in 2011. A decade later, Coker is creating his next masterpiece. As president of BELLATOR, he is developing a top-tier MMA promotion, providing a home for established fighters and emerging stars.

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Q&A: BELLATOR CEO Scott Coker on the Current Landscape of the Promotion

by: JUSTIN BARRASSO

April 16, 2021

Scott Coker is known for his work building Strikeforce, the promotion he founded in 1985 and sold to UFC in 2011. A decade later, Coker is creating his next masterpiece. As president of BELLATOR, he is developing a top-tier MMA promotion, providing a home for established fighters and emerging stars.

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Sports Illustrated: As evident in your work with Strikeforce, you possess the gift of patience. That is extraordinarily hard to have when building a roster. You have revamped the BELLATOR roster since your arrival in 2014. What is the guiding principle in the development of the roster?

Scott Coker: This is definitely a ‘now’ business. Fans expect greatness. When we got this roster turned over to us, there was some talent, but we needed a lot more. We couldn’t just go out there and buy free agents; they just weren’t there at the time. We picked up people when we could, like Phil Davis, and then Ryan Bader came over shortly thereafter. We sprinkled some free agents in, but I’m from the old school, and believe you have to build from the ground up. That takes time to cultivate.

Fighters like A.J. McKee, who’s fighting Pitbull [Freire] likely late this summer, is an example of taking a fighter and building up. Now he’s matched up with Pitbull, who’s pound-for-pound our number one fighter in BELLATOR. It takes fighters three, four or five years to get ready to fight anybody in the world. That’s the process; it just takes time. We’re good star identifiers and star builders, and this is just our beginning. We have added free agents,
IN THE 
PRESS

we’re going to add more and we mix that with guys we’ve built from the ground up.

SI: Speaking of building, you now feature a light heavyweight division in BELLATOR that can compete with any promotion in the world.

SC: We have the greatest 205 weight class on the planet. This tournament has eight killers in it. It started last week with Bader and [Lyoto] Machida, and now there’s the two fights this weekend: Vadim Nemkov–Phil Davis, that’s going to be an amazing fight. I’m also really excited to see what happens with [Corey] Anderson–[Dovletdzhan] Yagshimuradov. Whoever wins this gauntlet, he’s more than World Grand Prix Light Heavyweight Champion. He’s the best 205-pound fighter on the planet.

SI: Airing on Showtime is also a significant part of the growth of the BELLATOR brand. Big picture, what does this partnership mean to BELLATOR?

SC: I’m excited about this new relationship. We’ve had a lot of different partners, but Showtime, this is our home. Working with their executive team, it’s very much been a reunion. When I had Strikeforce, we had a Showtime/CSVS deal. The people that were then back in ’11 when I sold Strikeforce to the UFC, they are still there today. Stephen Esparza is still the man in charge there. David Dimkins, Sheila Mills, Chris DeBlasio. Gordon Hall—it’s the exact same team. That’s why we were able to dive in together the past two weeks and you’ll see it again this week.

I can’t wait to get these fights on the CBS network. The executives here really see the vision, and that excites me. The roster we have now is the best roster in the history of the company, and now we’re with a network that really knows how to promote combat sports. When you think about Showtime, with BELLATOR and boxing, we are the best value in combat sports.

SI: Are there any potential dates you can share for a card on CBS?

SC: That hasn’t been picked out yet, but I think you’ll see a BELLATOR special by this fall.

SI: In terms of branding, your lead broadcaster, Mauro Ranallo, is a perfect representation of BELLATOR.

SC: The knowledge Mauro has of mixed martial arts is quite spectacular. I’ve known him for a long time, since he was doing Pride in the ’90s. When I think about the voice of mixed martial arts and combat sports in general, and someone who possesses that knowledge and passion and ability to tell a story, he’s number one.

SI: Looking ahead, the legendary Fedor Emelianenko is ready to return to the cage. Junior dos Santos and Alistair Overeem have both been rumored as potential opponents. Is there an update on Fedor’s future?

SC: A.J. versus Pitbull is likely happening in July. We just announced Cris Cyborg’s fight, we’re announcing Douglas Lima’s next
opponent at BELLATOR 257, and we’re hashing out Fedor’s next opponent. We’re talking to everybody—Alistair, JDS and some of our guys internally make sense.

It’s going to be a spectacular event. There are two fights left on his retirement tour. He’s the greatest heavyweight of all time as far as I’m concerned, and I can’t wait to see him compete in his next two fights. Then he’ll probably retire, and maybe he’ll be a brand ambassador for us. We should have something to announce within the next two or three weeks for Fedor and it’s a very exciting time for BELLATOR.

SI: Are there any details you can share on Fedor’s next fight?

SC: I’ll give you a little nugget. Fedor’s fight will be in his home country [Russia].

SI: You mentioned Fedor as a brand ambassador, and another fighter doing that is Michael Chandler. Though he is now fighting with the UFC, so much of his greatness was built in BELLATOR—and every win in UFC only enhances BELLATOR.

SC: This is the co-promotion, BELLATOR versus UFC. That’s what people want to see. When Michael and I last spoke, I said, “Go kick some ass and win that belt.” I really enjoyed his time here at BELLATOR. He’ll be in the Hall of Fame someday, and he’s done so much for martial arts. I’m all about supporting Michael. It’s not fighting for the name of a company that makes you great. It’s all about the individual fighters. And in every weight class, we have fighters that can fight anywhere in the world, including UFC.

SI: Why should fight fans invest in BELLATOR 257?

SC: This light heavyweight tournament is really special. The fights this weekend are going to dictate the next matchups, and Showtime is going to put on some great content.

This is like sudden death. If you win, you move on. If you lose, you go home. And we’re giving a million-dollar bonus check to the tournament winner, so the fighters are pumped up. I’m looking forward to watching live. Unfortunately, the fans can’t be here in-person. I do see light at the end of the tunnel, but it might be a couple more months. Until then, tune in to Showtime.
BELLATOR President Scott Coker sat down with The Athletic to discuss his promotion’s return to Showtime, their newly unveiled rankings and the fights he’s most excited about.

You’re at the airport headed to Hartford. It seems like Mohegan Sun has turned into a bit of a home for the promotion?

Yes, it’s been a great home. And when COVID hit, we really evaluated a couple locations and thought about where to have this bubble. In order for us to continue to operate, under the protocol that Viacom created, we needed to create a bubble like the NBA did and the Mohegan Sun worked out perfectly. They’ve been a great host for us and we’ve had fights since July there, and I think we’ll probably be there at least there through maybe late summer.

It seems like there’s light at the end of the tunnel, so we might be able to start doing fights in major arenas around the country again. But until that time, the Mohegan Sun is our home.
What’s the latest you’ve been hearing in terms of different states opening up for attendance? Like you said, there does seem to be a light at the end of the tunnel. Do you think it’s going to be a while before you’re able to do that? When I think about doing arenas, I think that we will probably want to have more than just one or two states open or three states open. Knowing the Viacom protocols and the people behind it – which do a very great job because their job is to ensure safety first – they probably feel a little bit more comfortable knowing that the entire country is opened up and ready to go.

You’re making your return to Showtime this week. You obviously have a great connection there from your past. How did that come about and what expectations do you have for the partnership?

It’s actually a very interesting story because I had a brand called Strikeforce and sold it to the UFC. We were still on Showtime and CBS at the tail end of the Strikeforce relationship. We still had the Showtime deal, and when Strikeforce ended, its last show was in 2013. We were still on Showtime – that was the last Showtime MMA broadcast. I was on a three-year non-compete. I ended talking to a gentleman by the name of Kevin Kay, who convinced me to come over to Spike TV and start showing fights with them and taking over the BELLATOR brand.

That was six years ago, going on seven years ago. So seven years ago, I took this job at Viacom to help Spike TV run its BELLATOR brand. Within a couple of years, we met with Steven Espinoza. We said, “Is there an opportunity here because Spike is OK if we take BELLATOR off-channel into different properties and explore different business opportunities.” He was interested but we just couldn’t come to a deal. There were budget issues; things like that. But once a merger happened a year ago, it just made a lot of sense for us to be reunited with Showtime. Think about all of the great MMA fights or fighters that have built the brand in the Showtime space. When we had Strikeforce we were building Tyron Woodley at the time, Daniel Cormier, Luke Rockhold, Ronda Rousey, the list goes on and on. They had really good success and helped catapult the next generation of athletes and they’re very good storytellers, good brand builders.

When they said, “we’re going to put you back on Showtime,” it just made a lot of sense to me. It was like a reunion in a lot of ways because the same people that were there 10 years ago, or seven or eight years ago, are still there today.
UK public-service broadcaster the BBC has acquired rights to US-based mixed martial arts promotion BELLATOR until the end of the year.

The BBC will hold exclusive rights to BELLATOR in the UK and will show live shows and on-demand highlights on its iPlayer digital platform.

The deal has been signed after the BBC showed BELLATOR’s Paris event in October last year. The event marked the first major MMA meeting to take place in France since the sport became officially recognised in the country.

The BBC’s coverage under the new deal will begin with the BELLATOR 255 event on April 2, which will feature Patricio Freire versus Emmanuel Sanchez. Further events are scheduled for April 9, April 17 and May 7, with more bouts to be announced in the coming months.

UK rights to BELLATOR were previously held by pay-television broadcaster Sky and free-to-air commercial broadcaster Channel 5.

The BBC’s deal with BELLATOR comes after the series earlier this week signed an exclusive deal in the US with pay-television broadcaster Showtime. BELLATOR had previously been showing events on CBS Sports Network as part of a deal signed in September.