

★
BELLATOR MMA
PRESS KIT
★



★
**ABOUT
BELLATOR
MMA**
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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 by 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 Paramount, 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 launched a yearly \$1,000,000 World Grand Prix in 2018, beginning with the heavyweight division, where Ryan Bader emerged victorious becoming the promotion's first two-division champion. Following the success of that initial tournament, BELLATOR held subsequent tournaments in the welterweight division 2019, which was won by Douglas Lima, and a 16-man Featherweight World Grand Prix, which was won by A.J. McKee.

Currently in progress is the 2021 Light Heavyweight World Grand Prix, which will be settled by a grand finale between divisional kingpin Vadim Nemkov and top-ranked challenger Corey Anderson after their first meeting ended in a "No-Contest." Also in progress is the 2022 Bantamweight World Grand Prix, which is in the semi-final stage, leaving matchups between interim champion Raufeon Stots and budding star Danny Sabatello, as well as submission ace Patchy Mix versus dynamic Russian Magomed Magomedov.

To date, BELLATOR has hosted over 285 live events in 34 states and ten countries including historic events bringing the first major MMA promotion to France, Hungary and Israel.



★
ABOUT
SCOTT
COKER
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Hired by Paramount (then known as Viacom) 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.

Strikeforce became home to the sport's biggest stars and future champions, including Daniel Cormier, Ronda Rousey, Fedor Emelianenko, Tyron Woodley, Robbie Lawler, Luke Rockhold, Fabricio Werdum, "Jacare" Souza, Gilbert Melendez, Cung Le, Nick Diaz, Dan Henderson, Alistair Overeem, Clay Guida and Josh Thomson.

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 Paramount family on SHOWTIME.

★ HOW TO WATCH ★



TM

HOW TO WATCH

BELLATOR MMA

 ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, BELARUS, ESTONIA, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, LATVIA, LITHUANIA, MOLDOVA, TAJIKISTAN, TURKMENISTAN, UZBEKISTAN			
 AUSTRALIA - 10 play		 JAPAN - U-NEXT	
 BRAZIL - ESPN		 NIGERIA - SPORTY	
 BULGARIA - bTV		 NETHERLANDS - PARAMOUNT NETWORK	
  CZECH REPUBLIC & SLOVAKIA - NOVA SPORT		 POLAND - TVP SPORT	
   FRANCE, BELGIUM & SWITZERLAND - RMC SPORT		 SPAIN - GOL	
 HUNGARY - ARENA4		   SWEDEN, NORWAY, DENMARK - PlutoTV	
 IRELAND - VIRGIN MEDIA		 UKRAINE - MEGOGO	
 ISRAEL - EGO		 UNITED KINGDOM - BBC THREE	
 ITALY - MOLA		 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA - SHOWTIME	
   INDONESIA, MALAYSIA, SINGAPORE - MOLA		 VIETNAM - FPT PLAY	

CHECK LOCAL LISTINGS
FOR PRELIMS + MAIN CARD

IF YOUR COUNTRY IS NOT
LISTED, PLEASE CHECK



★
**LIGHT
HEAVYWEIGHT
WORLD GRAND PRIX**
★



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★
BANTAMWEIGHT
WORLD GRAND PRIX
★



★
WORLD TITLE
CHAMPIONS
★



TM

FLYWEIGHT (W)

LIZ
'GIRL-RILLA'
CARMOUCHE



RECORD: 17 - 7

BORN: 02 - 19 -1984

HEIGHT: 5' 5"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
San Diego, California, USA

WEIGHT CLASS: 125 lb

FEATHERWEIGHT (W)

CRIS
CYBORG



RECORD: 26 - 2

BORN: 07 - 09 - 1985

HEIGHT: 5' 8"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
San Diego, California, USA

WEIGHT CLASS: 145 lb

BANTAMWEIGHT

SERGIO
PETTIS



RECORD: 22 - 5

BORN: 08 - 18 -1993

HEIGHT: 5' 6"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

WEIGHT CLASS: 135 lb

★
WORLD TITLE
CHAMPIONS
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FEATHERWEIGHT

PATRICIO
PITBULL



RECORD: 34 - 5

BORN: 07 - 07 - 1987

HEIGHT: 5' 5"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

WEIGHT CLASS: 145 lb

LIGHTWEIGHT

PATRICKY
PITBULL



RECORD: 24 - 10

BORN: 01 - 21 - 1986

HEIGHT: 5' 7"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil

WEIGHT CLASS: 155 lb

WELTERWEIGHT

YAROSLAV
'DYNAMO'
AMOSOV



RECORD: 26 - 0

BORN: 09 - 09 - 1993

HEIGHT: 5' 10"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
Irpina, Ukraine

WEIGHT CLASS: 170 lb

★
WORLD TITLE
CHAMPIONS
★



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MIDDLEWEIGHT

JOHNNY
'THE HUMAN CHEAT CODE'
EBLEN



RECORD: 12 - 0

BORN: 12 - 13 - 1991

HEIGHT: 6' 3"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
Kansas City, Missouri, USA

WEIGHT CLASS: 185 lb

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT

VADIM
NEMKOV



RECORD: 15 - 2

BORN: 06 - 20 - 1992

HEIGHT: 6' 0"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
Sary Oskol, Belgorod Oblast, Russia

WEIGHT CLASS: 205 lb

HEAVYWEIGHT

RYAN
'DARTH'
BADER



RECORD: 30 - 7

BORN: 06 - 07 - 1983

HEIGHT: 6' 2"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
Tempe, Arizona, USA

WEIGHT CLASS: 265 lb

★
**INTERIM
WORLD TITLE
CHAMPIONS**
★



BANTAMWEIGHT

RAUFEON
'SUPA'
STOTS



RECORD: 18 - 1

BORN: 12 - 16 - 1988

HEIGHT: 5' 6"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA

WEIGHT CLASS: 135 lb

WELTERWEIGHT

LOGAN
'STORM'
STORLEY



RECORD: 14 - 1

BORN: 09 - 08 - 1992

HEIGHT: 5' 8"

FIGHTING OUT OF:
Webster, South Dakota, USA

WEIGHT CLASS: 170 lb

★
2022
HIGHLIGHTS
★



TM

SUBMISSION *of the* YEAR

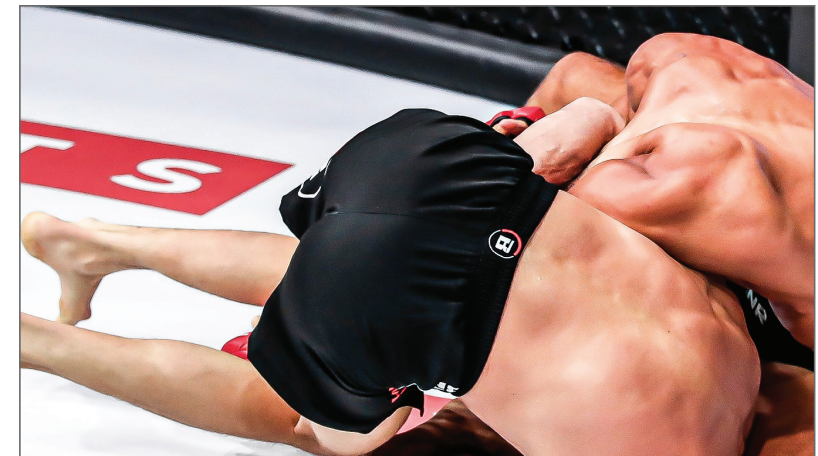
LUCA POCLIT
defeats DANTE SCHIRO

SUBMISSION: LUCANATOR CHOKE

ROUND 2 | 4:27

BELLATOR 285

09 - 23 - 2022



SUBMISSION *of the* YEAR

MAGOMED MAGOMEDOV
defeats ENRIQUE BARZOLA

KNOCKOUT: GUILLOTINE CHOKE

ROUND 4 | 1:27

BELLATOR 282

06 - 24 - 2022



SUBMISSION *of the* YEAR

OLIVER ENKAMP
defeats MARK LEMMINGER

KNOCKOUT: BUGGY CHOKE

ROUND 3 | 0:25

BELLATOR 281

05 - 13 - 2022



★
2022
HIGHLIGHTS
★



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KNOCKOUT of the YEAR

RAUFEON STOTS
defeats JUAN ARCHULETA

KNOCKOUT: HEADKICK

ROUND 3 | 0:16

BELLATOR 279

04 - 23 - 2022



KNOCKOUT of the YEAR

DALTON ROSTA
defeats ROMERO COTTON

KNOCKOUT: SUPERMAN PUNCH

ROUND 3 | 0:38

BELLATOR 283

07 - 22 - 2022



KNOCKOUT of the YEAR

GOITI YAMAUCHI
defeats NEIMAN GRACIE

KNOCKOUT: UPPERCUT

ROUND 2 | 3:58

BELLATOR 284

08 - 12 - 2022



★
2022
HIGHLIGHTS
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FIGHT of the YEAR

AJ MCKEE
defeats SPIKE CARLYLE

DECISION: UNANIMOUS

BELLATOR 286

10 - 01 - 2022



FIGHT of the YEAR

CRIS CYBORG
defeats ARLENE BLENCOWE

DECISION: UNANIMOUS

BELLATOR 279

04 - 23 - 2022



FIGHT of the YEAR

ROGELIO LUNA
defeats SOCRATES HERNANDEZ

KNOCKOUT: PUNCHES

ROUND 3 | 4:48

BELLATOR 277

04 - 15 - 2022



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ASSOCIATED PRESS

BELLATOR MMA promotion moving exclusively to Showtime

February 9, 2021

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.

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PRESS**
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**SPORTS BUSINESS
JOURNAL**

**Showtime Becomes Exclusive
Home For BELLATOR In New
Deal**

February 10, 2021

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).



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DEADLINE

**Showtime To Air BELLATOR MMA
Bouts In New Showcase For
ViacomCBS-Owned Circuit**

by: DADE HAYES

February 9, 2021



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 Espinoza, 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."

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NEWSDAY

**BELLATOR announces light
heavyweight grand prix in its
move to Showtime**

by: MARK LA MONICA

February 9, 2021

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.

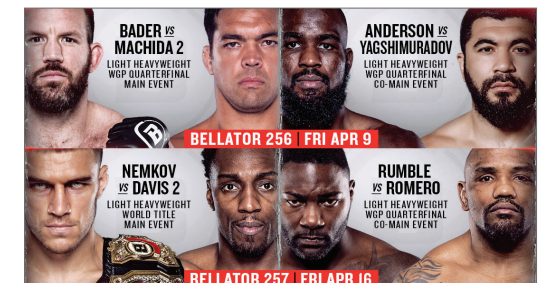
"BELLATOR has matured and elevated itself to a point where it now belongs on a premium television network," Showtime's Stephen Espinoza said.

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.

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CBS SPORTS

**2021 Bellator MMA event
schedule: Douglas Lima vs.
Michael Page 2 among big fights
on tap for summer**

by: BRENT BROOKHOUSE

September 20, 2021



The hits keep on coming for Bellator MMA. The promotion capped off its Featherweight World Grand Prix in July by crowning a new champion when AJ McKee stopped two-division king Patricio Pitbull in the first round

by submission. McKee is arguably the hottest fighter in the division now with a perfect 18-0 record while streaking to the title -- and collecting the \$1 million prize.

The promotion is ready to head back to London this fall when a pair of top welterweight contenders rematch in the main event as Douglas Lima takes on Michael "Venom" Page at the SSE Arena. Lima scored a thrilling second-round TKO over Page in the Bellator Welterweight World Grand Prix en route to reclaiming his title as champion. He lost the belt in June to Yaroslav Amosov and this could be a de facto No. 1 contender's bout.

Plus, we finally have a date for the semifinals of the Bellator Light Heavyweight World Grand Prix where all four combatants will be in action on the same night. Champion Vadim Nemkov, Ryan Bader and Corey Anderson will all hit the cage on Oct. 16 in Phoenix with the right to advance to the final and the \$1 million prize still alive. Anthony "Rumble" Johnson was expected to face Nemkov in the main event, however, an illness has forced Johnson out of action with Julius Anglickas taking his place.

And as the calendar turns to November, the promotion makes its return to Dublin, Ireland, for the return of a top bantamweight prospect in James Gallagher. The 24-year-old has bounced back nicely from the lone defeat of his pro career with four straight wins, three of which coming by way of stoppage. He gets a tough customer in Patchy Mix in the main event from the 3Arena in Dublin on Nov. 5.

Be sure to check back in on this page to stay up to date on the upcoming Bellator events throughout the remainder of the year.

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PRESS**
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CBS

**BELLATOR MMA to introduce
official rankings across all weight
classes and pound for pound**

by: BRENT BROOKHOUSE

February 18, 2021

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.

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SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

**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.

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, you possess the gift of patience. That is extraordinarily hard to have when building a roster, but you have revamped the

BELLATOR roster since your arrival in 2014. Was it difficult to use patience as one of your guiding principles 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. I knew 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,

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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/CBS deal. The people that were then back in '11 when I sold Strikeforce to the UFC, they are still there today. Stephen Espinoza is still the man in charge there. David Dinkins, 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

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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

just 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.



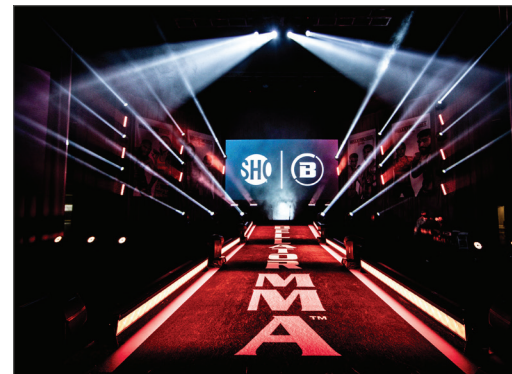
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THE ATHLETIC

Bellator — not UFC — owns the weekend with highly anticipated featherweight grand prix final

by: Ben Fowlkes

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The thing about MMA tournaments is there's just so many ways for them to go wrong. You can load the bracket up with your best fighters. You can pick compelling matchups all along the way. But you're always a couple injuries

or a poorly timed contract dispute away from having the whole thing blow up in your face.

Given that risk, it's kind of amazing how well Bellator's featherweight grand prix has turned out. Granted, there's still Saturday night's finale to get through, and celebrating too early is a great way to curse the whole venture and end on a double disqualification due to repeated groin strikes. But at least so far? This really couldn't have gone any better.

On one side you've got the reigning, dominant champion, Patricio "Pitbull" Freire, who was running out of ways to convince us of his greatness before this tournament came along. On the other you've got the undefeated MMA legacy pick, A.J. McKee, a homegrown talent who seems like he could be the face of Bellator's future.

Somehow, both made it through in one piece to meet each other in the finals. Pretty much the ideal final fight, which so rarely happens with these things, and it feels like it's coming along right at the perfect time.

Either way it goes, as long as the ending is decisive and at least somewhat satisfying,

there's no losing for Bellator. If "Pitbull" defends his belt and stays champ, his claim to the title of world's best 145-pounder only gets stronger. If McKee unseats him, that's a big deal, a major shift in the order of things, and he's instantly a bankable champ who fans will want to see more of.

Then there's also the timing of the thing. Normally, Bellator doesn't want to go up against the UFC. Just in terms of name value—both the brands themselves and the fighters they have— it's a losing proposition 90 percent of the time. But Saturday's UFC Fight Night is... really nothing special. And Saturday's Bellator 263 is the best lineup Scott Coker's promotion has had in a while. Such are the fruits of the long play, banking on the tournament to build momentum and interest over time, culminating in a final fight that feels like the perfect climax.

There aren't many weekends where Bellator manages to capture the greater share of the MMA spotlight, but this feels like one of them. And honestly, it's a refreshing change, even if it may not last.

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SPORT BUSINESS

**BBC to show BELLATOR events
throughout 2021**

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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.