

All Bark And No Bite

BY KELLY CRIGGER

The World Alliance of Mixed Martial Arts (WAMMA) recently awarded Fedor Emelianenko a symbolic ring in praise of his ascendancy to the first-ever WAMMA heavyweight championship title. Too bad it's not worth the metal it was cast from, as WAMMA is a hollow organisation whose influence is severely hampered by the absence of the 800lb gorilla of MMA, Zuffa.

Dana White has clearly stated that Zuffa (who own the UFC and WEC) wants nothing to do with WAMMA, which has a lot of people in MMA scratching their heads in amazement. After all, if a bunch of promotions get together to make the sport better, shouldn't the juggernaut that brought us out of the dark ages take an active role in guiding it?

Nope. Collective organisations like WAMMA redistribute power among their members, so it's a great opportunity for the little guys to get onto a level playing field and be treated the same as the big guys. But for a member who already negotiates from a power position, such as Zuffa, these organisations only dilute their authority and benefit them very little.

Dana White has worked hard over the last six years to make the UFC brand as powerful as it is and to have the influence on the MMA world that it does. With a substantial amount of cash reserves and the best talent in the world, Zuffa doesn't need anyone's help at this point. By joining WAMMA, Zuffa would voluntarily give up a great deal of that power (and probably a sizable amount of income that could be used to promote fights) with almost no financial return. His competition, on the other hand, would suddenly have the ability to lobby WAMMA to change the rules, such as time limits, weight classes, and illegal strikes. If everyone in WAMMA agreed, the UFC and WEC, as members, would have to comply. This only weakens their power base and financial position, so for the UFC, it's just not a good deal.

International cooperation, where monetary profit is not an overt goal, is a different story but the dynamic is the same. It's probably not the type of comparison you were expecting, but the relationship between the United Nations and the United States is exactly the same as the relationship between the WAMMA and



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Zuffa. The UN and WAMMA are collective organisations who derive their power from the recognition, resources, and active participation of their constituent members.

Without everyone coming to the table and agreeing to cooperate, the organisation fails. Even with just one powerful member abstaining from the group and refusing to recognise the legitimacy of the organisation, it is inherently weak. The United States has always been a begrudging partner of the United Nations, because it saps the power base of the strongest country on the planet while draining money that never gets returned, except in moral propensity. The United States provides 22% of the total UN budget, far more than any other nation,

yet has to succumb to UN resolutions that are offensive or corrupt, such as support for the controversial UN sub-organisation, United Nations Educational, Science, and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO]. That makes being a member risky and unattractive, so checks and balances, particularly the formation of the Security Council, were built into the UN from its earliest days to ensure the US maintained a semblance of power. The US still uses its dues to the UN as leverage to get what it wants, further eroding its legitimacy as a global peacekeeping entity.

On the other end of the spectrum are the smaller nations of the world who have little to no influence on the global stage and thereby reap the rewards of membership. By joining the UN, they suddenly have a voice in international affairs, an outlet to air their grievances, and a more powerful way to take action in the form of general assembly votes. For these reasons, collective organisations greatly favour the smaller, weaker participants by pooling their resources and levelling the playing field. Some say that's the way it should be; redistributing wealth and power from those who have it to those who don't. That philosophy goes against all that the US stands for – free market economics and self-determination – so it's easy to see why America has little tolerance for the UN.

This dynamic begs the question, is WAMMA doomed to fail or could it one day become a credible force in MMA? That is completely up to the leadership at Zuffa. Right now Zuffa sits on the outside of the WAMMA world thumbing their noses at them and continuing to conduct operations as they see fit. They're a private company who are beholden to no one but themselves (and the state athletic commissions), so they can completely ignore anything and everything that WAMMA does.

If the stars aligned and White suddenly had a change of heart to join WAMMA, it would easily be the most powerful organisation in the sport, even if it required Zuffa to make concessions and stipulations in return for their involvement. But until that day, it won't matter how big Affliction, Dream, or Strikeforce become, or how popular their non-Zuffa talent pool is; WAMMA will continue to hand out congratulatory gifts that ring hollow. **FO**

Is this month's guest writer on the money or way off the mark? Tell us your thoughts by emailing in to fighters.only@gmail.com