



By Kelly Crigger
Illustration by Pixel Pushers

Robbed!

FIGHTERS FACE A TOUGH CROSSROADS
WHEN AN EASY DECISION BECOMES A MAJOR
DISAPPOINTMENT.

“I was shocked as hell,” says Matt Lindland, recalling the moment in 2006 when he feels current UFC Light Heavyweight Champion Quinton Jackson got an early Christmas gift at his expense. “Look at Quinton’s face after that fight. He knows he lost,” says Lindland, a natural middleweight who pumped his fist and raised it to the World Fighting Alliance crowd in anticipation of the decision. But when the verdict was read for Jackson, Lindland spun around like a pickpocket had just made off with his wallet. Rather than flip off the camera, he shook Jackson’s hand and walked away, locking the disappointment in a bottle and setting it out to sea.

Having your house ransacked

leaves you with intermittent feelings of insecurity and rage. Being robbed in the cage is no different. Dominating a fight and then watching another man's hand raised in victory can be a traumatic blow to one's self-confidence.

At the moment of the offense, the victim of a perceived theft has two options: humble acceptance or childish temper tantrum. In a recent display of grand larceny, Michael Bisping made a clean getaway with Matt Hamill's victory at UFC 75. Hamill took the high road, but not because he couldn't hear the decision.

"When the ref raised Bisping's hand and not mine, I was pretty stunned," says the hearing-impaired Hamill. "I went through a lot of different emotions but tried to be graceful about the judges' decision." As a result, Hamill's likeability quotient soared. Unapologetically cocky in victory, Bisping's public image took a harder hit than George W. Bush's approval rating.

After a long fight that saw Devin Cole mount Orvil Palmer for more than five minutes of a 12-minute fight at an IFL event in June 2007, Cole was ready to receive some good news. "I went to the corner and Dennis Hallman was there. I asked him how I did and he said, 'If you lose this fight, I'll strip down naked and run around the ring.' That's how confident he was that I won."

Cole didn't win and Hallman was too stunned to follow through on his promise, as the Washington crowd booed the decision for several long minutes. Cole took the high road and walked quietly out of the ring after congratulating Palmer.

"What else could I have done?" Cole says. "I did everything I planned to do to him."

Therapist and counselor Erik Fisher, PhD, who received his graduate training in sports psychology, and is the author of "The Art of Managing Everyday Conflict" (Praeger Publishers, 2004), believes that a man's reaction at this moment of crisis comes down to confidence versus arrogance. Fisher believes that an athlete who walks away from a tough loss is more likely to be confident in life, while an unnecessary display of emotion is a thin veil for greater shortcomings.

"Arrogance is a shield of false pride, while confidence is a belief in what you can do and how you can do it," says Fisher. "You can aspire to a goal and reach that goal if you're confident. For those people, they know that as long as they did their best, then that's good enough."



"Look at Quinton's face after that fight. He knows he lost," says Lindland.

As a lifelong wrestler, Darrell Gholar learned long ago that doing your best is all that can be expected. It is a lesson that served him well in his MMA career, especially after he suffered what is widely considered the most blatant robbery in MMA history. At the 1998 International Vale Tudo Championships, Gholar inexplicably lost a decision to hometown fighter Johil de Oliveira despite mounting Oliveira multiple times and raining down bare-knuckled pain throughout the fight.

"It was strange, but it was my first fight so I didn't let it bother me," says Gholar. "I was young. I knew I had more fights coming up. I didn't let it get to me much."

With hundreds of elite-level wrestling matches under his belt and a wealth of international experience, Gholar knew that life in the decision lane was not always fair. Some fighters are not so diplomatic. In February 2007, Bart Palaszewski felt he was dealt an unfair hand by referees and decided to speak his mind.

"I was emotional," Palaszewski says of the first time he lost to Chris Horodecki at an International Fight League event in Houston, Texas. Palaszewski responded to the decision by storming out of the ring like a jilted lover and giving an expletive-laced interview afterward.

"We'd slugged it out for 20 minutes and then I find out I didn't do enough to impress the judges. That sucked, but the way I handled it was wrong," he admits. "I think what got to me is I was acting like a thug. I hate it when guys act that way, and then I went and did it. The last thing I want to do is portray the sport badly."

Palaszewski resolved not to let it happen again. In late 2007 he lost two more fights, a controversial submission loss to Devidias Taurosevicius and then dropped another split decision to Horodecki. He displayed an increased level of maturity after each contest.

"The second time I fought Chris it was in my hometown, and I really didn't want to be a punk in front of my friends and family," Palaszewski says. "I was pissed that I lost again, but I wasn't going to be an ass the second time around."

Fisher simplifies the gut reaction of anger that overpowers rational thought as being the polar opposite of confidence. "Poor sportsmanship can be reduced to arrogance," says Fisher. "It usually comes down to the way athletes live their lives. They've never believed in themselves and they use that arrogance as a shield in their sporting life. It's not just the sport but how they approach life. For most people, sports and life are the same. The way they approach one is the way they approach the other."

As evidenced during his recent stint on VH1's "Celebrity Rehab," Ricco Rodriguez is no stranger to uncontrolled bursts of anger. In August 2003, he had good reason. Rodriguez accepted a last-minute underdog match with Pride poster boy Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira at Pride Total Elimination. Formerly under contract with Pride but now fighting as a visiting UFC emissary, Rodriguez had not ingratiated himself with his former employers.



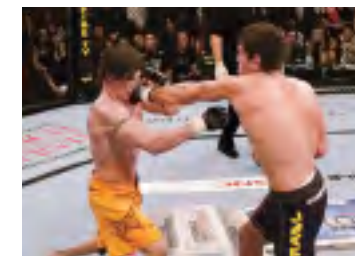
As the verdict of the judges was announced, Chris Horodecki (right) raised his arms in victory and relief as Bart Palaszewski (left) stormed off in disgust.

Undertrained and overweight, Rodriguez nevertheless matched his opponent blow for blow on the feet and maintained dominant position against the jiu-jitsu master on the mat. It didn't matter.

"I outboxed him, I outwrestled him. I even performed the 'Nogueira Sweep' on him," says Rodriguez. "He has his own move that he does. He did it to Tim Sylvia and I did it to him. I performed the 'Nog Sweep' on Nog and I still lost."

Rodriguez reacted by storming into the locker room with a camera crew close behind and treating the Japanese viewing audience to an English lesson in American-style F-bombs. Then he took his anger out on his hotel room.

**nick
diaz:
from
caviar
to canned
tuna**



Going the distance is rarely a good thing for Nick Diaz, MMA's Patron Saint of Losing Close Decisions. In the span of five months, Diaz lost three close and consecutive decisions in the UFC, resulting in more than \$40,000 in lost prize money. But the lost purses are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to actual cost.

"The pay goes up with each fight, so if I had won those fights it would have gone up a lot," Diaz

says. "I'd probably be making over \$100K a fight by now. I'd be set."

More than the short-term monetary reward is the big score that many fighters dream of: becoming a household name and opening their own mixed martial arts school. The fights Diaz lost indefinitely postponed the day he could achieve that goal.

"People come to you when you have a nice gym," Diaz says.

"So if I was making more I'd probably have a bunch of students by now, but I'm still at the same place as when I was in the f---ing IFC."

If that wasn't enough, the lost decisions had one more adverse domino-style effect that would have impacted several other fighters in the UFC welterweight division. Let's travel back in time to three fights before the disappointing decisionfest and sup-

pose Diaz wins the decision over Karo Parisyan at UFC 49.

"I think it would have put me on a whole different streak," says Diaz. "I mean, Karo would have fought Diego instead of me, so that loss would be gone, too. Then I might have gotten a shot at Hughes instead of Riggs, and I would have kicked his ass. The whole outcome would be different if I had gotten the decision over Karo."



Left: For years, UFC judges seemed to be impressed with the guy who spent the most time on top. Yet Kevin Randleman lost a decision after smothering Bas Rutten for nearly their entire fight. Below: Major underdog Ricco Rodriguez (right) had the fight of his life when he met Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira at Pride. It wasn't enough to sway the judges.

It's a bizarre truth that MMA is a subjective sport, similar to ice dancing and Miss Universe pageants when it comes to scoring. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and the judges' views are the only ones that matter.

"Sometimes there's boxing judges, sometimes they're kickboxing judges. I think there were even karate judges once," says Palaszewski. "They all see different things

"The Japanese fined me \$15K [because] I trashed the hotel room. I threw the TV out of a 30-story window. Thank God no one was down there."

"If fighters display a temper tantrum, then they're really just stuck at an early age," says Fisher. "The temper-tantrum types feel they have to win everything. They feel like a loser if they're not winning and are always looking for ways to prove they can do anything or beat anyone."

Back in the United States, Rodriguez was demoted to dark-match status at UFC 45 against Pedro Rizzo. The result was another loss, his third in a row. It would be his last fight in the UFC. "That was the low part of my life, man. Three losses in a row is tough to come back from," Rodriguez says.



"The Japanese fined me \$15K [because] I trashed the hotel room. I threw the TV out of a 30-story window. Thank God no one was down there." —Ricco Rodriguez

and look for different things. It's never the same and you can never tell what they're going to see as winning."

This is the MMA version of the social contract. As members of a society, citizens agree to adhere to its laws or face punishment for breaking them. Athletes enter into a similar contract when they step into the arena that puts their fate into the hands of the judges if they fail to finish the contest on their own.

"If you leave it in the judges' hands, it's always going to be your fault," says Cole. "I had chances to finish him and didn't take them. It's a learning experience. You have to end the fight whenever you get the chance."

The feeling of being robbed can create a psychological obstacle for a fighter. In the best-case scenario, he comes back breathing fire in order to make a statement; in the worst case, he falls under a black cloud of self-doubt that hangs over him like the Hindenburg just waiting to burst into flames. Either way, he faces a crossroads that tests his character and affects his longevity in the sport. The path he follows can depend on how stable he is outside the ring as much as his skill inside it. 🤖

44 In most cases, a robbery doesn't stay with the losing party for long. But Kevin Randleman experienced lingering emotions that evolved into hatred for the opponent who, in his mind, stole his title. In 1999, Randleman lost the UFC heavyweight strap to Bas Rutten in one of the most hotly contested decisions in the UFC. "I couldn't stand [Bas] after that," Randleman says. "We met in Japan a few years later and we joked around about it, but it took a while. I'm never gonna like being robbed. If you would have asked me [about that fight] years ago, I would have said, 'beleepity bleep bleep f---ing bleep.'"