

Guest Post: MMA VS Pro Wrestling: Which sport is more popular?

For those of you who don't care for them, this isn't an ad and there are no casino links included.

James Di Rosa

When it comes to MMA (UFC) and Pro Wrestling (WWE), there are only really two factors to consider in determining overall popularity... viewing figures (both live and TV), and money (revenue and worth).

Hang on a minute, I hear you scream passionately...there's one major issue with this debate! UFC is a legitimate combat sport, whilst WWE follows plotlines, relies on staged fighting and is generally, therefore, more comparable to soap operas! And you'd be right, by the way!

Having said that, the two products operate within a very similar niche and both have remarkably similar business models, with revenue coming primarily from pay-per-view events, TV rights deals and subscription-based streaming options. As a result, comparing the two, in terms of popularity, actually makes a whole lot of sense.

The Finances

When it comes to revenue, there isn't an awful lot to separate these two giants of combat entertainment. According to Forbes, the UFC brand recorded an annual revenue of \$600 million in 2017, whilst WWE totalled \$659 million just two years earlier.

A closer look at their respective main TV deals, however, shows a little more disparity. Up until its end in 2018, the UFC averaged \$100 million a year from its agreement with FOX, whilst the WWE averaged more like \$150 million a year with NBC Universal over the same period. That's a third more in TV revenue for the WWE year on year for an extended period of time!

Why then, was the UFC sold for \$4 billion in 2015, making it the fastest growing organisation in professional sports since 2005, when the WWE has only recently been valued at just \$1.5 billion...? This is probably something to do with UFC's rapid growth rate in comparison to WWE in recent years. Since 2007, WWE total revenue has grown at an average rate of 4.2% per year, whilst the UFC has recorded average annual growth of 14.6% in the same period.

So what does all this actually mean? Some within [wrestling news](#) circles have suggested that the recent sale of UFC merely confirms that the WWE is actually undervalued at \$1.5 billion and is probably worth at least double that. For the purposes of our analysis, there really isn't a whole lot to separate the two. UFC revenue may be growing at a significantly faster rate in recent years, but the WWE has demonstrated a longevity in money-making that the UFC simply can't compete with just yet.

The Fans

WWE is available in 180 countries and 20 different languages, with the UFC reaching these kinds of numbers more recently, thanks to the rolling out of their Fight Pass streaming service. You only have to look at the multitude of websites detailing the [latest MMA news](#) to realise just how big this product has become!

When we take a look at the Pay Per View (PPV) ratings of the two different packages there are some stark differences, however. According to Business Insider, three UFC fights appear in the top 10 PPV fights of all time, with Conor McGregor's recent bout vs Khabib Nurmagomedov featuring at number 3 and drawing viewing figures of 2.5 million. In contrast, you have to venture as far down the list as number 26 before a WWE event is featured, and that was Wrestlemania XXVIII back in 2012 with less than half the viewers.

Live attendances, however, seem to tell a different story all together. Of the top 5 most attended WWE events of 2018 there was an average crowd of 37,429, with a bumper 78,133 at Wrestlemania 34. Of the top 5 most attended UFC events of 2018, however, there was an average of 19,363 watching live, with a peak of just 22,603. It is hard to tell whether

this is simply a matter of venue size, as opposed to appetite for tickets, but it does certainly demonstrate the potentially greater appeal of WWE to live audiences. Something, which may be a result of wrestling's longer track record in producing a truly entertaining product.

The Verdict

Between the finances and the viewing figures there really doesn't seem to be a clear cut answer as to whether MMA or Pro Wrestling is more popular. What we can say for certain, though, is that UFC is growing more quickly as a product than WWE at this moment in time, and that more people seem to be willing to part with their cash to access pay per view events for UFC. Having said that, the success of the WWE in generating a product which people have enjoyed watching over such a long period of time is testament to its global popularity. Add to that, it's far superior live audiences, and WWE surely can't be considered any less popular than UFC.

Our conclusion? Make up your own mind ☐

James is a MMA & pro wrestling fanatic with a passion for blogging and podcasting. With over 5 years of experience in editing and content creation, James also has a brown belt in BJJ and is a part time ski instructor.

Website:

<https://www.fightful.com>