

MMA (MIXED MARTIAL ARTS) – AS MODERN SPORT OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract:

Mixed Martial Arts (then: MMA) are the most versatile kind of combat sports. They include skills originating from three Olympic sports disciplines, striking sports (kickboxing, Muay Thai) and BJJ techniques. The hard training of MMA competitor is based on combining all skills and techniques into one which allows to become the best in one's weight category. To be a good contestant one has to dedicate his or her life to training. Professional MMA fighters devote all their time to trainings, being helped by specialists in effort physiology, human nutrition or physical preparation.

The following study aims to show MMA as a versatile sport and being the most popular combat sport in Poland.

The methodology of finding the sources to write the following paper was based on the analysis of the existing works and looking for information in specialized press. The materials and information needed for writing of this paper were also taken from PDF documents and general fight rules accepted by KSW Federation. Moreover, the analysis of other publications concerning mixed martial arts was conducted. The authors used Dictionary of Sport and Dictionary of Marketing as well.

According to the public opinion polls carried out, from year to year, MMA has an increase in viewership and interest of people interested in sports.

The versatility and spectacular nature of MMA has meant that it is the most popular martial art in Poland.

INTRODUCTION

The year 1996 marked the beginnings of Mixed Martial Arts (then: MMA) in Poland. In this year the first Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu (then: BJJ) school was opened in Poland. Its name was 'Czarny Pas' ('Black Belt'), then the school was renamed into 'Strefa Walki Poznań' ('Combat Zone Poznan'). The school started cooperation with many instructors from Brazil¹. Soon, the people who are today regarded as pioneers of BJJ and MMA in Poland: Mirosław Okniński (MMA Warsaw, Okninski Team), Mariusz and Maciej Linke (Linke Gold Team), Piotr Bagiński and Robert Siedziako (Berserkers Team Szczecin), Marcin Dudek (Grappling Cracow), started to work for the school in Poznań.

In the year 2000 other schools specializing in BJJ and MMA were opened in Poland. Mirosław Okniński (One of the first MMA coaches in Poland, the black belt holder in BJJ), who in the same year fought in a spectacular combat with Michał Luto shown on TV, had a great influence on development of MMA in Poland. Moreover, Okniński confronted his fighters with the ones who had previously trained judo, kickboxing or boxing. The first fight took place on the 10th October 2002 during 'Body Show' sports fair. Grzegorz Jakubowski (now he's coach in combat club Mighty Bulls Gdynia) from Gdynia and Temistokles Teresiewicz from Łódź met in a specially prepared arena- octagon. The fight lasted for 45 minutes after which a referee declared a draw.

KSW Federation is an organization which had an enormous influence on development of MMA in Poland. The first gala was organized on the 27th of February 2004 in Champion Restaurant in Marriott Hotel. The event was viewed by very few fans. The second gala, organized on the 10th of July 2004, was broadcast live by a sports television². It was then when people in Poland understood that mixed martial arts are an interesting sports discipline and that each next gala will arouse more and more sport excitement.

These were the beginnings of mixed martial arts in Poland. In the first years of MMA's existence, hardly anyone knew what MMA were, there were only a few people who were familiar with the general fight rules. At first contestants representing different types of martial arts and combat sports fought with one another, so for example a judoka was confronted with a boxer. However, with time, fighters started to cross-train to become multidimensional. MMA is not associated in any international federation, it is not represented in the Olympic Games either. Many believe MMA is not a kind of sports discipline, which is, however, wrong. This will be proved in the following paper.

¹ Oral interview with Karol Matuszczyk.

² Oral interview with Maciej Kawulski

To describe the topic thoroughly, it is necessary to explain the notion of *sport*. What is sport? Taking into consideration various definitions of sport, it becomes clear that every author understands the notion differently.

Sport, in general, is conscious human activity, which is:

1. Individual or team rivalry between people to defeat time and an opponent, the elements being present either together or separately.
2. Improving individual motor skills: strength, speed, jumping, endurance, dexterity and precision. Furthermore, psychological resilience and tactical and conceptual skills are developed as well.
3. Voluntary participation.
4. Compliance with the regulations of rivalry.
5. The lack of direct outside-sport targets like military or production ones³.

Participating in sport without financial benefits and money-oriented participation allows to differentiate between amateur sport (without financial benefits) and professional sport (aimed at earning money).

Wojciech Lipoński in *Humanistyczna Encyklopedia* claims that there are activities which are not types of sport. These are, among others: (...) *games of arcade type and lotteries (...) card games, checkers, chess, skill or strength performances (...) e.g. circus performances, (...) military exercises or industrial competitiveness (...) where the main aim is fighting condition or production capacity, competition between animals without the presence of man e.g. dog racing, cockfights, rivalry of man and animal when the aim is to kill the animal (...), hunting and fishing (...), rivalry between people when the aim is to kill, hurt or make an opponent unconscious (war, guerrilla warfare, gladiator fights, etc.)*⁴.

According to Roman Michał Kalina (...) *combat sports are commonly associated with these disciplines of sport where rivalry is based on direct fight of two competing sportsmen*⁵. *It is necessary to say that combat sports differ from martial arts as in combat sports there is the element of sports rivalry. In addition, combat sports come, to some extent, from martial arts such as e.g. judo, wrestling, boxing or taekwondo which originated from the need for fight or defense. Moreover, some types of martial arts or combat sports allow both stand-up or ground fighting, and a great part of a training in combat sport is devoted to cross-*

³ W. Lipoński: *Humanistyczna encyklopedia sportu*, Sport i Turystyka, Warszawa 1987, p. 312.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 312 (the author's own translation).

⁵ R. M. Kalina: *Teoria sportów walki*, COS, Warszawa 2000, p. 89 (the author's own translation).

training⁶. Combat sports can be characterized by the following features: competition, self-fulfillment to the extent of one's own capabilities, learning how to work and think creatively, working individually and as a team member, experiencing different extreme emotions (euphoria, fear). The additional benefits are: the possibility to get to know one's own country and the world by taking part in competitions, hobby, acquiring a new profession or skills and gaining popularity connected with achieving good results in sport⁷.

Analyzing definitions and knowing what MMA are based on, it can be claimed that MMA are a kind of sport. MMA training surely causes striving for improving individual motor skills mentioned by Wojciech Lipoński, e.g. strength, endurance, agility, speed and precision. Mental skills are also developed: resistance to stress, tactical and creative thinking. Furthermore, MMA fight is a clash between two contestants on a voluntary participation basis. Recently the MMA fighting rules, both in Poland and in the world, have developed a lot. It is clearly stated what is and what is not allowed. The fighting rules of Polish KSW⁸ Federation, the leading organization promoting MMA in Europe, can serve as an example. Illegal techniques mentioned there are:

- elbow strikes to the body
- strikes to the back of head
- strikes to the spine
- strikes to the kidneys
- punches and kicks to the groin
- pinching
- attacking the opponent when the referee is separating the fighters
- an attempt to throwing or pushing the opponent out of the ring
- scratching
- eye gouging
- hair pulling
- head butts
- attacks aimed at larynx and trachea
- attacking the opponent under the protection of the referee

Illegal techniques when one fighter is on the ground:

⁶ K. Raczkowski: *Sztuka walki i samoobrony, w aspekcie historycznym, prawnym i psychologicznym*, Difin, Warszawa 2008, p. 20 (the author's own translation).

⁷ Ibid., p. 20

⁸ KSW Federation established in Poland in 2004 by Maciej Kawulski and Martin Lewandowski.

- kicks and knees to the head
- stomps to the head
- heel kicks to the kidneys⁹.

According to the definition given by Wojciech Lipoński, concerning activities which are not types of sport, it is easy to notice that MMA do not have any of the characteristics mentioned.

According to the above presented definition by Roman Michał Kalina, MMA are also a type of combat sport, as it is of a cross-cutting nature because MMA competitor's training contains e.g. elements of wrestling, judo or boxing. This issue will further be discussed in the next section.

MMA are also the discipline for people of strong character, not being afraid of hard work during trainings and able to face the stress accompanying the fight (often in front of the audience of several thousand people).

As it was mentioned above, MMA are, despite the lack of unified federation in Poland, a type of sport. In modern MMA, a competitor aspiring to become one of the best fighters must possess high-level skills of a cross-cutting nature, taken from different sports disciplines. These are mainly skills used in Olympic sports such as: boxing, judo, wrestling, but also in BJJ, ju-jitsu, kickboxing and Muay Thai.

All the skills of the mentioned Olympic sports are important, but nowadays the most important are wrestling techniques allowing to control the fight. Wrestling, as an Olympic discipline, has been contested in the Olympic Games since 1896. Wrestling styles can be divided into Greco-Roman style where it is forbidden to hold the opponent below the belt, and freestyle wrestling which allows the use of the wrestler's or his opponent's legs in defense and offence. In MMA wrestling elements which make it easier to bring the fight to the ground are practised, e.g. a pin (alternatively called 'a fall', scoring a point from a judge), which allows to finish the fight before the scheduled time by submission. Furthermore, good wrestling skills allow the fighter to defend himself against being taken down by the opponent.

Another sport which is a part of the training of MMA competitor is judo. Polish judo traditions are widely known, but it is worth pointing out that one of the contestants fighting in MMA was Paweł Nastula¹⁰. Judo appeared at the Olympic Games in 1964 in Tokyo and since 1972 it has been still present. There is a wide range of judo techniques. One of the joint locks

⁹ KSW Rules: <http://www.kswmma.com/archiwum/zasady.pdf>. Date of access: December 2017.

¹⁰ Paweł Nastula decided to end his MMA career after the fight with Mariusz Pudzianowski in December 2014.

used both in judo and MMA is armbar (judo: *Ude hishigi juji gatame* and MMA: *balacha* (*armbar*) – photos presented below).



Fig. 1. Ude hishigi juji gatame (source: the author's own collection)



Fig. 1. Armbar Ude hishigi juji gatame used by MMA fighter (source: judo4mma.com)

Another of the techniques used in MMA, borrowed from judo is *Ude garami* (in mixed martial arts is a *kimura*, fig. 3.). Lever on arm- specifically on the shoulder joint.



Fig. 3. Ude garami- kimura (source: ufc.com)

The second technique used both in MMA and in judo is *hadaka jime* (*mata leao* in mixed martial arts, Fig. 4). This technique is used by MMA fighters very often due to the ease of "assumptions" techniques.



Fig. 4. Mata leao – hadaka jime (source: www.ufc.com)

Next two choke techniques are: *okuri eri jime* (arm triangle choke - Fig. 5) and *senaku jime* (triangle choke – Fig. 6).

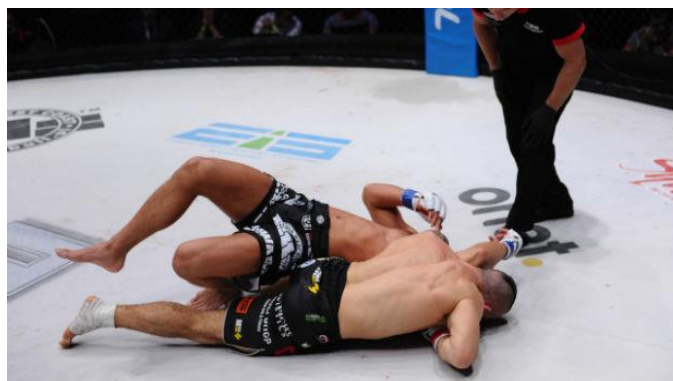


Fig. 5. Arm triangle choke by KSW middleweight champion Borys Mańkowski (source: the author's own collection)



Fig. 6. Triangle choke - UFC fight - Tito Ortiz vs. Lyoto Machida

Boxing is the third of the Olympic sports disciplines incorporated into MMA cross-training. Boxing appeared at the Olympic Games in 1904 and 1908 and since 1920 it has always been contested. MMA because of their characteristics use different gloves in fight than the ones used in boxing. These are open-fingered gloves (Fig. 7) and they are much smaller than typical boxing gloves (Fig. 8). The boxing training for MMA requirements is a bit

different. Striking techniques and the way punches are blown also differ because of the sport's characteristics and the design of gloves.



Fig. 7. Gloves used in MMA (source: the author's own collection)



Fig. 8. Boxing gloves (source: the author's own collection)

Other sports which are included in the training of MMA competitors are kickboxing and Thai boxing (Muay Thai). Skillful use of strong low kicks (Fig. 9) e.g. to an opponent's forward leg often makes the opponent unable to fight because of muscle injury. Thai clinch (Fig. 10) and other technical elements of Muay Thai are very practical and frequently used in MMA fights.

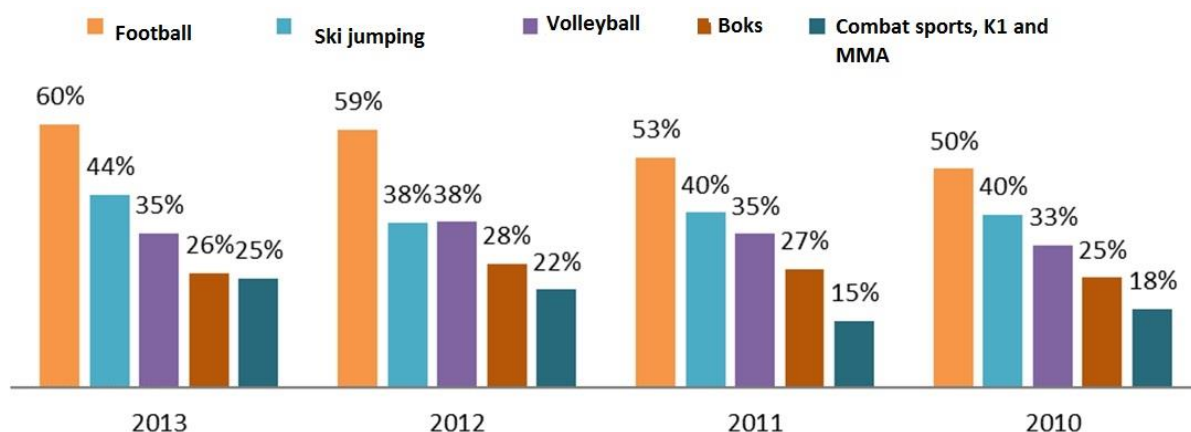


Fig. 9. Low-kick - UFC fight - Jose Aldo vs. Frankie Edgar (source: www.ufc.com)



Fig. 10. Thai clinch used in MMA fight (source: the author's own collection)

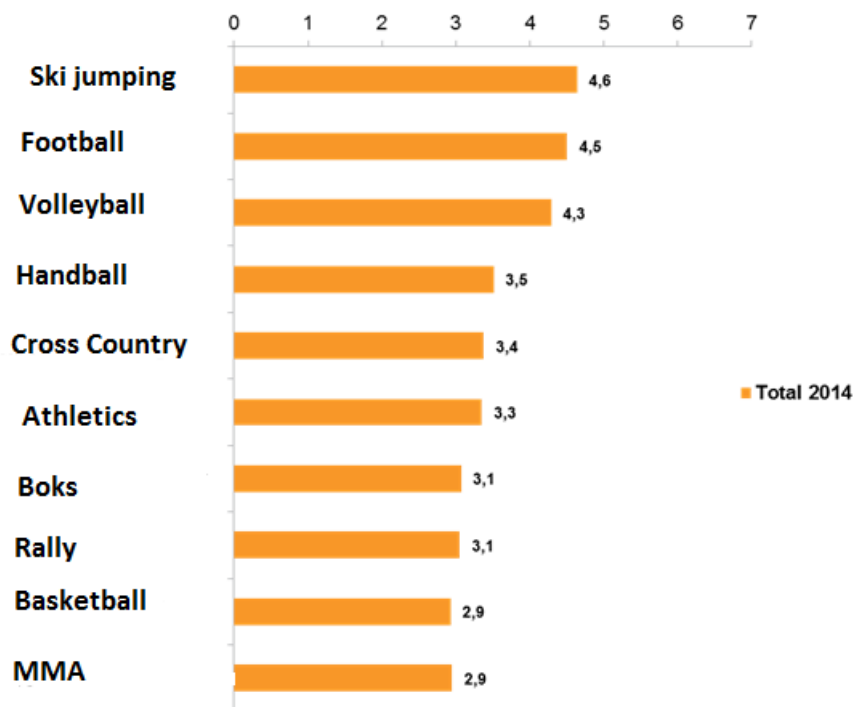
Viewership is the term used for marketing research of the media. To be exact, this term determines what percentage of people, watching TV at a given time, are the viewers of a given program (in other words how far they are actually involved in audience share)¹¹. MMA is a sport that has been growing in popularity since 2010 (according to research) and what follows, in viewership (Graph 1). The graph below presents the results of the research in which people were asked what kind of sport they were interested in. The study 'Sponsoring Monitor 2013/2014' was carried out by computer-aided direct questionnaire interviews on a representative sample of 1815 inhabitants of Poland aged 15–65. The research was of a random-involvement character and was representative due to: the type of the place of residence of the surveyed, territorial allocation in the form of voivodship, gender, age and education (data concerning research results form 'Sponsoring Monitor' 2014).



Graph 1. The results of the research on interests of the surveyed (source: 'Sponsoring Monitor', years 2010–2013, ARC Rynek i Opinia)

¹¹ L. Charliene, J. Bernhof: *Marketing technologii społecznych*, Warszawa 2009, p. 22.

The results of the next research regarding viewership of sports in Poland in 2014 were published at the beginning of the year 2015. According to the results MMA was one of the ten most willingly watched sports in Poland. As the report of 'Sponsoring Monitor' 2014 ARC Rynek i Opinia shows, combat sports, including MMA, were the tenth as far as the most popular sports disciplines in Poland in 2014 are concerned. 'Sponsoring Monitor' is the most complex study on sponsorship in sport and culture in Poland. All the data and results were presented in Graph 2.



Graph 1. Popularity of sport in Poland in 2014 (source: 'Sponsoring Monitor' 2014, annual report, ARC Rynek i Opinia, January 2015)

In the research the scale from 1 to 7 was used, where 1 meant '**I'm not interested at all**' and 7 meant '**I'm interested a lot**'. The surveyed were the people interested in sport and they were to say which sports disciplines they are interested in and to what extent.

The results of viewership of galas organized by KSW Federation are also worth mentioning. Such results are rarely published, however, the data concerning three events organized by aforementioned federation could be found. The first event was KSW 30: „Genesis” gala, which took place on the 21st of February 2015 in Poznań. During the evening one could see Borys Mańkowski, Mateusz Gamrot and Łukasz Rajewski – a members of a local club- *Ankos MMA Poznań* and Karolina Kowalkiewicz (Polish contestant currently successfully fighting in American UFC Federation). As it was reported by Polsat TV station, the transmission of **KSW 30: Genesis** gala in Poznań was the most willingly watched

programme on Saturday evening. The gala transmission on **Polsat** and **Polsat Sport** reached nearly 20% of market share in a commercial group, and most viewers, almost 3 million, watched the fierce fight of women in which KSW strawweight category (under 52 kilos) champion **Karolina Kowalkiewicz** defeated a Brazilian **Kalindra Faria** in points¹². To compare - KSW 34: *New Order*, gala was watched by over 1,5 million people, KSW 28: *Fighter's Den* by about 2 million, KSW 22: *Pride Time* gala – more viewers - 2,51 million, KSW 19 - 3,45 million and KSW 18: *Unfinished Sympathy* by about 2,7 million viewers. However, KSW 12: *World's strongest man debut* gala was a record - the fight of Najman vs. Pudzianowski was watched by more than 4 million people. The fight of the night, at Polsat and Polsat Sport, was watched by a total of 6 million viewers¹³. The last event organized by KSW Federation i.e. KSW 36: *Three crowns* took place on the 1st of October 2016 in Zielona Góra. The average viewership of the event was 1,4 million viewers, whereas the fight of the night between Michał Materla and a Brazilian Rousimar Palhares attracted more than 1,6 million people [10]. Next KSW event will be on 2 of December in Kraków, KSW 37: *Circus if Pain*. Main event is fight between Mariusz Pudzianowski and popular rap artist Marcin "Popek" Rak. This gala is on Pay Per View (access is payable), so viewership doesn't beat record.

The number of people interested in this kind of sport and the results of viewership of each gala show that MMA have become strongly recognizable and attractive. Fights broadcast on television are exciting for viewers due to fast twists of action, changing stages of competition or spectacular ends of fights (by knock-out or by submission). Many fans of this sports discipline like MMA fights for their unpredictability and twists of action.

Mixed martial arts are a sports discipline that develops very quickly as far as marketing, sport and organizational structures are concerned. This can be proved by both the results of viewership of each gala and interest in the sports discipline as such. Mahmed Chalidov has contributed much into the development of MMA, and Mariusz Pudzianowski made MMA more popular and recognizable. Thanks to the best Polish strongman, many of his fans 'transferred' with him to mixed martial arts.

¹² Internet e- article on industry portal, mymma.pl: <http://mymma.pl/prawie-3-miliony-widzow-ogladalo-gale-ksw-30-genesis>, from 23 th of February 2015 r.

¹³ Internet e- article on industry portal, mmarocs.pl: <http://www.mmarocks.pl/wyniki-ogladalnosci/ksw-34-liderem-ogladalnosci-w-sobotni-wieczor>.

Conclusions

Mixed Martial Arts are the most versatile kind of combat sport. They include skills originating from three Olympic sports disciplines, striking sports (kickboxing, Muay Thai) and BJJ techniques. The hard training of MMA competitor is based on combining all skills and techniques into one which allows to become the best in one's weight class. To be a good contestant one has to dedicate his or her life to training¹⁴. Professional MMA fighters devote all their time to training.

Nowadays MMA in Poland are divided into professional and amateur ones. Amateurs are usually young fighters who have fought not more than three professional fights so far. However, professional fighters are the ones who have signed contracts with different organizations promoting MMA (not only in Poland). They are paid for fights. In spite of tight schedules connected with trainings, the MMA competitors are often students. Many of them have graduated from Information Technology, Physical Education, Tourism and Recreation. There are also those who have technical training (University of Technology graduates).

Professional MMA fighters devote all their time to trainings, improving their skills for a few hours every day. Assessment of ethical and moral for sport is allowed for each individual reader, because on point of view.

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