

THE PROFESSIONAL BOXING JUDGE MANUAL

2026 Edition

Applying the Scoring Criteria
and Sound Judgment

Ensuring the True Winner Emerges



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1. Introduction and Principles

Boxing is an international sport, belonging to no single country or boxing authority. Its integrity depends on officials who uphold the highest standards of professionalism, fairness, and consistency.

Judging a professional boxing bout carries a high level of responsibility. Each round must be evaluated independently and in real time, while multiple actions occur at once and under constant public scrutiny. Judges are expected to apply the scoring criteria consistently, without influence from the crowd, the Corners, reputations, or the narrative surrounding the bout.

Professional boxing judging requires discipline. Rounds are not scored on effort, appearance, or intent, but on results. The scoring criteria exist to identify which boxer performed better during the round, with the greatest weight placed on Fair Blows.

This manual begins with the foundation of scoring and moves step by step through common situations judges encounter. Its purpose is to support clear, defensible decisions that reflect what occurred in the ring during each round.

1.1 About This Manual

This manual outlines the principles, criteria, and practical application of professional boxing judging. It provides judges with a clear and consistent framework for evaluating each round under the 10-Point Must System, with an emphasis on fairness, accuracy, and accountability.

The manual explains the primary scoring criterion of Fair Blows and defines the role of the secondary criteria, Effective Aggression, Ring Generalship, and Active Defense, within the overall scoring structure. It clarifies how these criteria are used when determining the winner of a round, without reducing the central weight of Fair Blows.

Detailed guidance is provided on common judging challenges, including close rounds, even rounds, knockdowns, offsetting knockdowns, and rounds scored 10-8 without a knockdown. The manual also addresses timing boundaries, the competition period, actions at the bell, partial rounds, and how these factors affect scoring decisions.

2. Scoring Criteria & System

Fair Blows form the foundation of all judging. The boxer who lands the more effective clean, legal punches demonstrates greater effectiveness during the round and wins the round.

All bouts are scored using the 10-Point Must System. Three judges independently score each round using official scorecards, with no collaboration or influence among them. Judges must first determine the winner of the round using the established scoring criteria.

The round winner always receives 10 points, while the opponent receives 9 or fewer based on performance, legal knockdowns, and any referee-ordered deductions. This initial 10-point award represents the gross score before deductions are applied.

Only the referee may order point deductions. When this occurs, the judge must record the deduction in the designated field on the scorecard and subtract it from the offending boxer's gross score. Judges may not deduct points on their own initiative, and each round must be scored independently, without reference to prior rounds or public reaction.

After applying referee-ordered deductions or registered legal knockdowns, the result becomes the net score, which is the final score for that round. The net score is not a separate judgment, but the gross score adjusted by the referee's official actions. This distinction preserves the separation between performance evaluation and rule enforcement.

At the championship or elite level, boxing authorities typically use individual round scorecards, which are collected by the referee at the end of each round and delivered to the supervisor or boxing authority representative for recording and public announcement.

In most other professional bouts, judges complete a single continuous scorecard covering all scheduled rounds and submit it after the bout concludes. The referee then delivers the completed scorecards to the supervisor or boxing authority representative for review and public announcement.

Unless open scoring is approved by the boxing authority, all scorecards remain confidential until the conclusion of the bout.

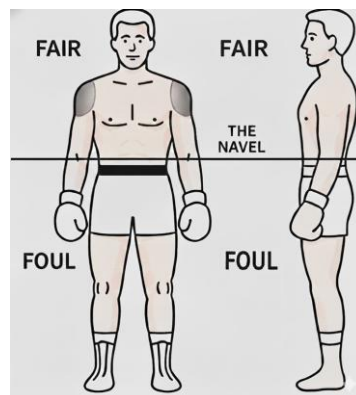
2.1 Fair Blows and Connection Between Other Criteria

Boxing's scoring system is built on four interrelated criteria. Fair Blows are the primary measure of effectiveness and are based on clean, legal punches. Effective Aggression, Ring Generalship, and Active Defense provide context for how scoring actions are created, limited, or controlled during the round. Together, they are used to determine which boxer deserves to win the round.

2.1.1 Evaluating Fair Blows

A fair blow is one that lands on:

- The front and sides of the head
- The front and sides of the torso above the waistline
- The upper arms near the front of the shoulders



Punches to the back of the head, spine, kidneys, or below the waistline do not score. Punches that land on the biceps, triceps, or forearms do not score because they strike non-scoring, defensive areas rather than legal scoring targets.

Judges must prioritize impact over volume. A single clean blow or combination that visibly hurts, staggers, or disrupts an opponent's balance, rhythm, or defense carries more scoring value than a series of light or glancing punches. The task is not to count blows, but to determine which boxer's legal punches produced the greater effect.

Fair Blows that land cleanly but cause little visible reaction may still have value when consistent, but they cannot outweigh fewer, more damaging punches.

The guiding question in every round is: **“Who landed the more consequential Fair Blows?”**

2.2 Secondary Criteria - Context for Fair Blows

The secondary criteria apply only to the extent that they help produce Fair Blows or limit the opponent's ability to do so. Their value depends on how directly they contribute to effective scoring or the prevention of scoring during the round.

2.2.1 Effective Aggression

Effective Aggression is the controlled and purposeful application of pressure that results in clean, impactful Fair Blows. It reflects a boxer's ability to advance strategically while maintaining sound defense and composure.

A boxer demonstrates Effective Aggression when pressure produces clean, effective scoring and limits the opponent's ability to respond. It requires intent and precision rather than reckless pursuit or crowd-pleasing flurries that lack effect.

Judges must distinguish between true Effective Aggression and ineffective activity. Chasing, swarming, or throwing high volumes of punches without accuracy or impact does not qualify. Advancing without landing, or while being repeatedly countered, reduces a boxer's effectiveness.

The following elements may be considered when evaluating Effective Aggression. They are not scored independently and do not replace Fair Blows but are evaluated collectively to determine whether aggression resulted in effective scoring during the round.

Key Elements of Effective Aggression:

Purposeful Pressure - Applying steady forward or lateral movement that leads to clean, effective scoring.

Controlled Offense - Maintaining balance and defensive awareness while attacking; avoiding reckless or wasted punches.

Conversion to Scoring - Turning aggression into results by landing fair blows rather than simply forcing exchanges.

Ring Positioning - Cutting off the ring and guiding the opponent into disadvantageous positions.

Sustained Composure - Applying pressure confidently without losing discipline or tactical focus.

2.2.2 Ring Generalship

Ring Generalship reflects a boxer's ability to control the timing, distance, and pace of the bout. It is demonstrated by directing how and where exchanges occur, rather than by excessive movement or avoidance of engagement. Movement alone does not establish control and does not merit scoring consideration unless it contributes to effective offensive or defensive outcomes.

When evaluating Ring Generalship, judges should identify which boxer consistently dictates the exchanges and positions themselves to land fair blows or limit the opponent's ability to do so.

The following elements may be considered when evaluating Ring Generalship. These elements are not scored independently and do not replace Fair Blows. They are evaluated collectively to determine whether a boxer exercised meaningful control during the round.

Key Elements of Ring Generalship:

Distance Control - Managing range and spacing to establish a preferred engagement distance and maintain command of exchanges.

Positional Command - Taking and holding advantageous angles, particularly following breaks, clinches, or resets.

Tempo and Timing - Dictating the rhythm and flow of the round and choosing when to initiate exchanges.

Strategic Anticipation - Reading the opponent's patterns and adapting tactics to maintain control.

Ring Control - Steering where and how the bout unfolds by imposing a preferred style of boxing.

2.2.3 Active Defense

Active Defense reflects a boxer's ability to prevent scoring blows through awareness, timing, and positioning while remaining in position to counter effectively. It is demonstrated by making the opponent miss and by turning defensive actions into meaningful countering opportunities.

A boxer may win a round through Active Defense when defensive skill consistently limits the opponent's effectiveness and results in clean, legal counterpunches; however, this is extremely rare. Defense that breaks rhythm, disrupts balance, or discourages continued offense carries value only when it contributes to effective scoring or clearly limits the opponent's scoring ability.

Defense must be purposeful. Simply avoiding contact, holding, or relying on a passive shell may reduce damage but does not demonstrate control or intent to compete and should not be rewarded. Effective Active Defense maintains engagement distance and preserves the ability to respond offensively.

Using the ropes defensively for evasion or countering is acceptable when it results in legal counterattacks but using them to gain momentum to land blows remains a foul.

The following elements may be considered when evaluating Active Defense. These elements are not scored independently and do not replace Fair Blows. They are evaluated collectively to determine whether defensive actions produced meaningful advantage during the round.

Key Elements of Active Defense:

Defensive Awareness - Reading distance, rhythm, and intent to anticipate incoming attacks.

Effective Evasion - Using slips, rolls, and footwork to make the opponent miss while staying in countering range.

Guard Efficiency - Blocking, parrying, or deflecting blows to reduce follow-up opportunities.

Transition to Offense - Creating scoring opportunities through immediate, precise counterpunching.

Balance and Positioning - Remaining composed and upright, avoiding excessive retreat, clinching, or loss of position.

2.3 Round Outcomes

When Fair Blows are even, judges may rely on the secondary scoring criteria to determine the winner of the round. These criteria are considered only to the extent that they created or denied effective scoring opportunities. If no boxer demonstrates a clear advantage under the secondary criteria, the round may be scored even.

10–10 - Truly even round. Extremely rare and must be defensible; proper application of the scoring criteria normally identifies a winner.

10–9 - Most common score. One boxer shows a clear edge or consistent effectiveness without sustained or overwhelming dominance.

10–8 - Decisive round marked by sustained dominance, one legal knockdown, or a referee-ordered point deduction.

10–7 - Two knockdowns, or one knockdown combined with overwhelming dominance, or a referee-ordered point deduction.

10–6 - Multiple knockdowns combined with sustained domination and/or a point deduction. Extremely rare. No round may be scored lower than 10–6.

These scores represent degrees of separation between the boxers based on their performance during the round.

Judges must remember that these margins are not mathematical formulas, but reflections of performance differences. Sound judgment is required so that each score accurately represents the level of separation between the boxers and maintains consistency throughout the bout.

2.3.1 Draw Resolution in Close Rounds

When both boxers appear to have landed a comparable number of Fair Blows, judges may rely on the secondary scoring criteria to determine the winner of the round.

In close rounds, judges should consider which boxer's actions produced greater effect, limited the opponent's effectiveness, or more clearly controlled the exchanges through Effective Aggression, Ring Generalship, or Active Defense.

This approach ensures that effect, not activity, determines the outcome of close rounds and helps minimize unnecessary even rounds.

2.4 Timing Boundaries and the Competition Period

Judges must score only the action that occurs during the official competition period, the time when the bout is actively underway. No scoring or deductions may be applied outside this period.

2.4.1 Definition of the Competition Period

In professional boxing, male bouts are contested in three (3)-minute rounds. Female bouts are contested in two (2)-minute rounds, although some boxing authorities may permit three-minute rounds. Regardless of round length, the scoring criteria and thresholds for dominance, damage, and duration remain the same in both male and female bouts. Judges must apply identical standards in all bouts, as the length of the round affects only the amount of observed action, not the judging criteria or the evaluation process.

2.4.2 Start and End of the Round

The timekeeper rings the bell to begin and end each round. Once the bell sounds to end the round, all scoring immediately stops.

Judges must not score or record deductions for any action that occurs after the bell.

Any post bell incidents are handled solely by the referee and have no bearing on that round's score.

2.4.3 Actions or Rulings Outside the Competition Period

Unless otherwise stated in the governing boxing authority's rules, deductions may be applied only for fouls committed during the competition period.

Once the bell ends a round, the scoring window closes until the next round begins. The one-minute rest period is not part of the competition period and is not eligible for scoring or point deductions.

If unsportsmanlike conduct or a foul occurs between rounds, the referee may issue a warning or, in serious cases, disqualify the offender. Judges must not record a deduction without direction from the supervisor or boxing authority representative, as no valid competition period exists.

If a referee mistakenly orders a point deduction after the round has ended, judges should not apply the deduction independently.

When the referee approaches to collect the scorecards, the judge may respectfully inform the referee that the round had concluded when the action occurred and that the scorecard has not been finalized because the incident took place outside the competition period.

The judge may also respectfully suggest that the referee consult with the supervisor or boxing authority representative for clarification, since one round has ended and the next has not yet begun.

Until direction is received, the scorecard remains incomplete for that round.

2.4.4 Knockdowns at the Bell

If a boxer is knocked down at the exact moment the bell rings, the referee continues the count. Judges must record the round outcome exactly as ruled by the referee, regardless of personal interpretation.

2.4.5 Partial Rounds

If a bout is stopped before the scheduled end of a round due to an accidental injury or an accidental foul (other than a low blow), the handling of the round depends on when the stoppage occurs. In accordance with the Four-Round Rule, a bout stopped before four (4) completed rounds is declared a No Decision, and the partial round is not scored. When a bout is stopped after four (4) completed rounds, judges must score the partial round based only on the action that occurred during the active competition period.

2.5 Judging Focus and Round-by-Round Evaluation

Judging requires complete focus and discipline. Each round must be evaluated independently, based only on the legal and effective boxing actions that occur within the competition period. By limiting attention to legitimate exchanges within the scoring window, judges maintain fairness, accuracy, and consistency throughout the bout.

Judging involves evaluating performance; enforcement remains the referee's domain. Judges observe and interpret the effectiveness of legal boxing actions, while only the referee may enforce rules through warnings or deductions. Maintaining this separation preserves consistency and protects both fairness and authority inside the ring.

From the opening bell, judges should track clean, effective Fair Blows, note momentum shifts, and recognize which boxer is controlling the exchanges. Awareness must extend to the entire ring, not only to the boxer nearest the judge.

Judges must always remain neutral. Judging is not emotional; it is a disciplined evaluation of performance under the established scoring criteria. Crowd reactions, Corner behavior, reputations, or preconceived expectations have no place in scoring.

2.5.1 Determining the Outcome

At the end of each round, judges must identify the winner by applying the established scoring criteria, giving the greatest weight to Fair Blows. Knockdowns or clear dominance affect the scoring margins, but the decision must always be grounded in the criteria.

Before applying any referee-ordered deductions, the judge should mentally confirm the round winner and the appropriate scoring margin.

2.5.2 Recording the Score

Once the round winner has been determined, judges must complete the scorecard clearly and in the proper order. Ten (10) points are recorded for the round winner, with nine (9) or fewer points recorded for the opponent. Any referee-ordered point deductions are applied only to the offending boxer. The resulting total is recorded as the official round score, with all knockdowns and deductions noted exactly as required by the boxing authority's scorecard format.

Judges should complete each entry promptly and legibly as soon as the round ends, avoiding hesitation or influence from ringside reactions.

2.6 Knockdowns and Their Weight

A legal knockdown is always significant and must be reflected in the score. Judges must evaluate it within the full context of the round, including what occurred before and after the knockdown. The weight of a knockdown is determined by its type and effect, not merely by its occurrence.

A brief flash knockdown, followed by an immediate and complete recovery, generally carries less weight than a damaging knockdown that leaves a boxer visibly hurt, disorganized, or unable to defend effectively.

When all other factors are even, or when the round is otherwise balanced, a knockdown remains decisive and should determine the winner of the round.

In rare cases, a round that might otherwise be scored 10–8 may be reduced to 10–9 if the downed boxer clearly outperforms the opponent for most of the round, particularly when the knockdown was brief and produced minimal lasting effect. However, the downed boxer cannot win the round; at best, the margin may be narrowed to 9–10.

2.6.1 Evaluation Factors and Calibration Anchors

When weighing a knockdown, judges should consider the round as a whole, including:

Type and Impact - Whether the knockdown was a flash with quick recovery or a damaging knockdown with lasting effect.

Control Before the Knockdown - Which boxer was dictating the action leading up to the knockdown.

Control After the Knockdown - Which boxer regained or maintained command once action resumed.

Visible Effect - Whether the downed boxer appeared hurt, hesitant, disorganized, or fully recovered.

A knockdown should never be treated as an automatic scoring formula. It must be weighed as part of the round's full story. The objective remains to determine which boxer performed better overall during that round.

2.7 10-8 Rounds Without a Knockdown

A 10–8 round without a knockdown requires overwhelming superiority throughout the round.

Judges should apply the 3D Standard:

Dominance - Clear superiority, with the opponent achieving little success.

Damage - Visible effect, including the opponent being stunned, disorganized, or repeatedly forced into a defensive posture.

Duration - Control sustained for most of the round, generally two-thirds or more, not a brief surge.

All three elements should be clearly present. If one element is missing or marginal, the round should be scored 10–9 instead.

A boxer who dominates only a short portion of the round, such as the final thirty seconds, does not meet the Duration requirement of the 3D Standard.

However, if a single sequence produces visible and lasting damage that leaves the opponent hurt or defenseless until the bell, a 10–8 score may still be warranted even without full Duration.

The determining factor is whether the effect altered the overall complexion of the round.

2.8 Offsetting Knockdowns

Offsetting knockdowns must never be treated as automatic equals in scoring. Judges must evaluate the entire round to determine which boxer demonstrated greater effectiveness, control, and overall impact across the full duration.

Judges should assess:

- Which knockdown carried greater effect, including degree of damage, loss of balance, or momentum shift.
- Which boxer controlled the action before and after the knockdowns.
- Clean, effective punching throughout the round.

Possible outcomes include:

10–10 - Only when both knockdowns and overall performance are truly equal. This outcome is rare.

10–9 - Awarded to the boxer who performed better overall once both knockdowns are considered.

10–8 - Appropriate when one knockdown was clearly more damaging and that boxer controlled the action before and after the knockdowns, demonstrating continued dominance and superior effective punching.

2.9 Summary

This section consolidates the core judging principles that support accurate, consistent, and fair scoring. It serves as a final reference point, reinforcing the standards judges must apply in every round, regardless of bout level, setting, or circumstance.

Core Judging Practices

- Always remain composed and neutral, regardless of crowd reaction, Corner behavior, or reputation.
- Evaluate the entire round, not isolated moments or brief closing exchanges.
- Prioritize impact and effectiveness over punch volume.
- Credit defense only when it creates effective scoring or countering opportunities.
- Apply referee signals and point deductions exactly as indicated.

Common Errors to Avoid

- Do not credit grazing or ineffective punches.
- Do not reward passive evasion or movement without countering.
- Do not base scoring decisions on prior rounds or expectations.
- Do not allow theatrics, noise, or outside opinions to influence scoring.
- Do not create, modify, or apply point deductions independently.

3. Closing

Judging demands focus, consistency, and calm under pressure. Each round must be evaluated on its own merits, based solely on what occurred during that period.

When the scoring criteria are applied with discipline and accuracy from the opening bell through the final round, outcomes require little interpretation or justification. The result reflects the performance shown in the ring.

By judging with fairness, independence, and confidence, judges uphold the integrity of the sport and ensure that victory is awarded to the boxer who earned it through effective, fair, and legal boxing.

4. About the Author

Armando Garcia is an international professional boxing official and trainer who remains active as a referee, judge, and supervisor. He is the author of *The Professional Boxing Referee Manual* (©2022) and has conducted referee and judge training programs worldwide.

Armando also manages his **You Tube Channel: The Boxing Officials Training Channel**.

He has trained international officials for the World Boxing Association (WBA) in multiple countries and has led training programs in the United States through the Association of Boxing Commissions (ABC), including programs attended by World Boxing Organization (WBO) and International Boxing Federation (IBF) officials. His ABC training work has reached numerous U.S. state commissions, including California, Florida, Missouri, Georgia, Washington, D.C., and New Mexico.

A former AIBA Continental Bureau Referee/Judge, he has also served in regulatory and administrative roles, including Executive Officer of the California State Athletic Commission. He was named WBA International Official of the Year (2002) and later received the WBC and Ringside Physicians Association Commissioner of the Year Award (2006).

His work emphasizes safety, fairness, consistency, and the practical application of boxing rules.

Professional Records (BoxRec – Official Boxing Record Keeper):

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