

# Off The Bench

Former Superior Court Judge Peter Polos now passes judgment on MMA fights

BY NANCY ROMMELMANN



**Peter J. Polos**

PANISH SHEA & BOYLE PERSONAL INJURY -  
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A look at the CV of the Honorable Peter Polos—Air Force ROTC, former Superior Court judge and litigator—shows a man invested in the basic concepts of fairness. "I am definitely rule-oriented," he says. "I can't even tell you how upset I get when something is unfair."

He's still a judge, by the way. Not in superior court, from which he retired in 2010, but as a licensed judge in mixed martial arts competitions.

He's a longtime fan. In high school, Polos swam and played water polo, and between seasons there was a wrestling program that needed someone in the under-100-pound weight class. Polos, tipping the scales at 99, fit the bill. Wrestling led to an interest in boxing and

martial arts, which he would watch with his father on TV. "And then this UFC thing came about," he says.

The Ultimate Fighting Championship, with its combination of karate, boxing, jujitsu and anything-goes, debuted in 1993.

"It was a combat sport; it wasn't regulated very well, and they only allowed it in Colorado at the time, so it was a forbidden thing to watch," he says. "It was just fascinating to me. I got hooked from there. I've watched every single UFC from 1 to ... I think we're at 243 now."

Back then, Polos was a practicing attorney who saw plenty of action in court—including winning settlements for those harmed by the diet drug fen-phen. "I probably spent four years of my career exclusively doing fen-phen cases," he says. In 2000, Gov. Gray Davis appointed him a superior court judge of Orange County. Polos' decision to leave the bench in 2010 dovetailed with his pursuit of a spot on the MMA bench.



"The [MMA] judge card, it just clicked," he says. "I loved it."

It was no easy switch. "I actually studied for it like I studied for the Bar," he says. In 2010, he received his license to judge amateur MMA competitions; in 2016, professional matches.

"I primarily do amateur fights for CAMO [California Amateur Mixed Martial Arts Organization], but I have been tapped to do about 20 pro fights for Bellator and UFC," he says. "What's interesting is a lot of the young championship fighters have come up through CAMO. For instance, Ronda Rousey."

Scoring MMA fighters tapped the same skills he'd honed watching attorneys battle it out in court. "One hundred percent," he says. "You weigh evidence and you make a decision and you have to be efficient at it and you have to be quick at it. You can't dally."

When Polos first became a fan of MMA, there were essentially no rules. "You could eye gouge. You could hit someone below the belt if you wanted to. You could twist stuff you're not supposed to twist," he says. By the time he became involved, MMA had established weight classes and rules meant to curtail the carnage.

Not that they always work. "Pre-fight, you watch hands get wrapped properly without anything illegal going in—somebody trying to gain an advantage by sticking something hard in the wrapping of their glove," he says. He adds that he loves getting to know the fighters and their backgrounds. "You talk to them and they're always asking questions. I'm not shy about telling them what I do or did. Their reaction is usually surprise, but then they start asking me questions about the legal system and what I do there. It's a terrific give-and-take."

Polos is always one of three judges positioned around the cage in order to see different angles. "We judge the fight and score it just like a boxing judge," he says. "Ten points for the winner of the round, and eight or nine—usually—for the loser of the round."

The MMA brass hasn't made a big deal out of having a former superior court judge ringside; for a time, Polos was mum on it, too. "A lot of people think it's a barbaric sport," he says. "But I've seen the positives of it. I've seen young men grow and just become better human beings."