

Niche sports and the doping you don't hear about

By Warren Cornwall, Outside

Last January, at the center of a Las Vegas arena, Anderson Silva secured his legacy as one of the best mixed-martial artists in history. The 40-year-old Brazilian fighter battered his opponent in five rounds of hooks, jabs, and kicks in a fight put on by the Ultimate Fighting Championship.

But four days later, the Nevada Athletic Commission announced that the fighter had tested positive for the steroid drostanolone in the run-up to the fight. It was a body blow to a sport long troubled by rumors of doping. Not only that, but Silva's opponent in that fight, Nick Diaz, also allegedly tested positive for marijuana in a post-fight test.

As drug scandals buffet marquee sports like pro cycling, track, and Major League Baseball, relatively low-profile, low-budget niche sports are trying to navigate the same treacherous waters. While cage fighting shares few things in common with ultramarathon running, obstacle course racing, CrossFit or mountaineering, there is one important common denominator: each sport is wrestling with the potential for doping—and the public-relations damage that comes with it. It's also becoming more apparent that it doesn't take the lure of Olympic gold or a seven-figure contract to make athletes cross the line.

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