

OFFICIAL COMPETITION SUMMARY

IMMAF Sports Department

Youth MMA Competition Rules and Procedures

Coach and Athlete Summary Version

Core Rule

Youth MMA is a developmental sport. Athlete safety overrides continuation, tactical advantage, and competitive outcome. When in doubt, officials must protect the athlete.

What this summary covers

- Age divisions and bout formats
- Universal youth safety rules
- Division-specific rules for Youth D, C, B, and A
- Illegal submissions and high-risk techniques
- Fouls, yellow/red cards, blood, and recovery time
- Scoring, tournament format, replay, 4th judge, and appeals
- Coach, team, and athlete responsibilities

1. Main Safety Principle

- No result is more important than athlete safety.
- Referees may stop submissions before a tap.
- Referees may stop a bout before a knockout happens.
- A youth bout must not continue with active bleeding.
- Coaches and athletes must accept early stoppages as part of Youth MMA safety.

Plain meaning for coaches

Do not coach athletes to “fight through” dangerous submissions, visible injury, bleeding, or loss of intelligent defense. Youth MMA protects the athlete before injury occurs.

2. Youth Divisions and Bout Format

Division	Age	Bout Format	Development Focus
Youth D	10-11	1 round x 2 minutes	Entry-level control and safety
Youth C	12-13	1 round x 3 minutes	Foundation grappling and safe positions
Youth B	14-15	1 round x 4 minutes	Expanded grappling with limited submissions
Youth A	16-17	3 rounds x 2 minutes; 1-minute rest	Transition toward Junior/Senior rules under youth safety limits

- Two-round youth contests are not permitted.

3. Universal Youth Rules

- No strikes to the head or face in any Youth division.
- No elbow or forearm strikes.
- No heel hooks.
- No twisters, neck cranks, can openers, cervical locks, slicers, or spinal manipulation submissions.
- No knees.
- No linear/front kicks directly targeting the knee.
- No technique that twists, compresses, cranks, or manipulates the neck or spine.
- No technique that twists or hyperextends the knee beyond safe limits unless expressly permitted by that division.

4. Division-Specific Rules

Youth D (10-11)

Focus: Entry-level control and safety.

Key prohibited: No knee strikes, grounded striking, bicep/calf crushes, body compressions, wristlocks, leg submissions, omoplata, suplex/elevated throws/slams, all types of guillotines, linear kicks to the knee, up-kicks, foot stomps, or jumping guard.

Allowed / notes: Basic grappling, positional control, and controlled takedowns. Throws must be hip-based with head and arm control. Pulling guard is allowed only if controlled.

Youth C (12-13)

Focus: Foundation grappling and safe positional development.

Key prohibited: No knee strikes, grounded striking, bicep/calf crushes, body compressions, wristlocks, leg submissions, omoplata, suplex/elevated throws/slams, all types of guillotines (classic and arm-in), linear kicks to the knee, up-kicks, or foot stomps.

Allowed / notes: Permitted basic grappling and submissions. Throws must be hip/hip-toss variations with head and arm control. Referee applies early safety stoppage.

Youth B (14-15)

Focus: Expanded grappling with limited submissions.

Key prohibited: No knee strikes, grounded striking, bicep/calf crushes, wristlocks, kneebars, omoplata, suplex/elevated throws/slams, standing guillotines, guillotines without arm-in, linear kicks to the knee, up-kicks, foot stomps, heel hooks, or toe holds.

Allowed / notes: Straight Achilles lock and figure-four ankle lock are allowed only with the leg straight. Guillotine must be arm-in and finished from grounded position. Any knee rotation makes the attack illegal.

Youth A (16-17)

Focus: Transition toward Junior/Senior structure under youth safety limits.

Key prohibited: No head strikes, knee strikes, kicks to the body of a downed opponent, bicep/calf crushes, wristlocks, suplex/elevated throws/slams, standing guillotines, linear kicks to knee, up-kicks, foot stomps, heel hooks, toe holds, neck cranks, or spinal manipulation.

Allowed / notes: Only Youth A permits controlled closed-fist ground striking to the body. Guillotine must be finished from grounded position and must not become a neck crank.

5. Illegal Submissions and High-Risk Techniques

Simple test If the technique twists the neck, twists the spine, twists the knee, compresses the cervical spine, or forces a joint beyond normal movement, assume it is illegal unless that exact technique is expressly allowed by the division rules.	
Technique / action	Why it is illegal or restricted
Heel hook / reverse heel hook	Creates rotational force through the knee. Illegal in all Youth divisions.
Toe hold	Rotates the foot and transfers force into the knee. Illegal in all Youth divisions.
Kneebar	Hyperextends the knee. Only permitted in Youth A division.
Twister	Twists the spine and neck. Illegal in all Youth divisions.
Can opener / neck crank / cervical crank	Compresses, bends, or twists the neck. Illegal in all Youth divisions.
Spine lock / spinal manipulation	Manipulates the back or neck beyond safe range. Illegal in all Youth divisions.
Straight ankle lock	Allowed only in Youth B and Youth A when applied straight, without knee twist.
Guillotine	Allowed only where division rules permit. Illegal if standing where prohibited or finished as a neck crank/cervical compression.
Biceps slicer / calf slicer	Generates uncontrolled force to the joint-bag and ligaments of the elbow and/or knee

6. Fouls, Cards, and Misconduct

Common fouls include eye gouging, groin attacks, fence grabbing, equipment grabbing, small joint manipulation, strikes to the spine/back of head, abusive language, corner interference, attacking after the bell, and unsportsmanlike conduct.

- Only the referee may call a foul.
- Judges do not assess fouls independently.
- Fouls may result in warning, point deduction, disqualification, or event removal depending on severity.
- A single warning may be issued for fence grabbing, holding equipment, or extended fingers toward the face/eyes. Repetition may escalate.

Unsportsmanlike conduct, Zero Tolerance policy, Yellow Card and Red Card Protocol

Card	When Used	Authority / Effect
Yellow Card	Serious misconduct and unsportsmanlike actions by an athlete or his cornerman, requiring formal intervention but controllable immediately. Examples: disrespectful gestures, verbal abuse, provocation, or inflammatory conduct.	Referee decision with Cage Leader approval. Recorded officially. May lead to warning, point deduction, escalation notice, or Commission review.
Red Card	Severe misconduct and unsportsmanlike actions by an athlete or his cornerman, repeated misconduct after Yellow Card: physical clash, discriminatory/derogatory conduct or conduct threatening safety/order. Leaving Field of Play at any stage prior to the announcement of the contest result (no jumping out and wild celebration)	Referee may recommend/initiate. Requires Chief Referee and/or Sports Director approval. Leads to DQ, event removal, loss of podium/medal eligibility where applicable.
Red card and instant DQ	Refusal to comply with podium/medal procedure, disrespect to national symbols in any form or manner	Leads to immediate event removal, loss of medal eligibility. Approved by Sports Director / Event Director, followed by Compliance and Disciplinary committee

- Applies to athletes, coaches, cornermen, team officials, and accredited team representatives.
- No podium participation without accepted justification may mean no medal recognition.
- Zero tolerance policy applies to national, political, discriminatory, or hostile conduct around the competition.

7. Recovery Time, Eye Pokes, and Blood

- A fouled athlete may receive up to five minutes recovery where the rule allows it.
- Five minutes is not automatic for every foul and does not override medical safety.
- For eye pokes, the referee stops time, allows recovery, and may involve the doctor.
- Coaches must not give tactical advice during medical evaluation.

Blood Policy

Any visible bleeding requires immediate stoppage. The bout cannot restart until bleeding is controlled, the area is cleaned, and the doctor confirms no blood exposure risk. Youth athletes have a maximum cumulative five minutes in the bout to control bleeding. Active bleeding after that limit means mandatory termination.

Cause of bleeding	Outcome principle
Legal action	Bleeding athlete loses by TKO/medical stoppage if unable to continue safely.
Accidental reason	Affected athlete loses by medical reasons after cumulative time is exhausted but may continue in round robin only if medically cleared.
Intentional prohibited action	Injured athlete advances; offending athlete loses under foul outcome.
Prohibited technique	Mandatory termination; foul classification determines result and sanction.

8. Technical Submissions, Chokes, and Knockdowns

- Youth athletes are not allowed to endure submissions until injury.
- The referee may stop a submission before the athlete taps.
- If an athlete cannot intelligently defend or cannot safely escape, the referee must stop the bout.
- If the referee cannot confirm consciousness, they may ask: *"I need to know that you are okay"* No valid response means immediate stoppage.
- Two knockdowns in one round = automatic TKO.
- Three knockdowns in the contest = automatic TKO.
- The referee may stop a flashdown or visible impairment before a knockout occurs.

9. Scoring and Tournament Format

Priority	Scoring Criterion	Meaning
1	Effective Striking and Grappling	Legal body strikes, takedowns, sweeps, passes, reversals, submission attempts, or advancing positions that create meaningful competitive consequence.
2	Effective Proactivity	Used only if the primary criterion is equal or absent. Rewards effective attempts to win, not empty movement.
3	Effective Bout Control	Used only if the first two are equal or absent. Rewards controlling where the bout happens and being effective there.
Score		Meaning
10-10		Extremely rare; no discernible advantage.
10-9		Most common; slight, moderate, or decisive edge.
10-8		Clear superiority with impact, dominance, and duration.
10-7		Very rare; total domination where stoppage would likely be warranted.

Youth Championships may use round robin format. Tie-breakers prioritize KO/TKO wins and times, submission wins, shorter submission time, decision quality, fewer fouls/deductions, and mutual contest result.

10. Replay, Red Light/Whistle, 4th Judge, and Appeals

Procedure	Key point for coaches and athletes
Instant Replay	Used for objective facts only: missed tap, eye poke, low blow, illegal knee, headbutt vs punch, early/late stoppage, time issue, incorrect restart, etc. Not used to re-score judging.

Procedure	Key point for coaches and athletes
Red Light/Whistle	Emergency procedural intervention for missed taps, unseen fouls, equipment issues, false claims, incorrect result before announcement, or where replay equipment is unavailable.
4th Judge	Dormant safeguard. Activated only by Chief Referee to replace a faulty or invalid scorecard. Not used because someone disagrees with a close round.
Appeals	After reviewed outcome is announced, no appeal is permitted.

11. Responsibilities

Role	Must do
Coach	Teach division rules, avoid illegal neck/spine/knee attacks, attend rules meeting, use white towel when needed, maintain respectful conduct.
Team Manager	Confirm registration, age band, technical standard, medical documents, weigh-in compliance, equipment, and appeal limits.
Athlete	Understand command in English "Are you OK?/ I need to know you are OK/ Show me you are OK" Obey referee commands, release immediately when instructed, do not falsely claim fouls, respect opponent, officials, flag, anthem, podium, and event procedures.

12. One-Page Competition Reminder

- No head or face strikes in any Youth division.
- No heel hooks, toe holds, slicers, neck cranks, twisters, can openers, or spinal manipulation.
- No body compressions for Youth D and C
- Youth B and A leg locks must stay straight and must not twist the knee.
- Youth A only: closed-fist ground striking to the body only.
- Bleeding stops the bout immediately; no active bleeding continuation; treatment where possible.
- Referees stop submissions early in Youth MMA.
- Respect opponent, flags, anthem, podium, officials, and event rules.
- Yellow/Red card misconduct can lead to DQ, event removal, and no medal recognition.
- 4th Judge is not an appeal tool for close rounds.
- After a reviewed result is announced, appeals are extremely limited.

Prepared by IMMAF Referees and Judges Commission

2026