Bellator is a leading global MMA and kickboxing promotion featuring many of the best athletes in the world. Under the direction of veteran fight promoter Scott Coker, Bellator events take place in major cities around the world and can be seen on television in over 160 countries to an available audience of over one billion people. In the United States, Bellator events can be seen on both Paramount Network (formerly Spike TV) and DAZN, the world’s first truly dedicated LIVE sports streaming service, while Bellator MMA Recharged airs on the CBS Sports Network.

Bellator is comprised of an executive team that includes top industry professionals in television production, live events, fighter development/relations, sponsorship, international licensing, marketing, advertising and public relations. Bellator is based in Hollywood, Calif. and owned by entertainment giant ViacomCBS, home to the world’s premier entertainment brands that connect with audiences through compelling content across television, motion picture, online and mobile platforms. In June of 2015, Bellator 138 broke franchise records for ratings, peaking at more than 2.9 million viewers, making it one of the most watched MMA events on cable television in 2015. At Bellator 170 in January 2017, 2.2 million viewers tuned in for Tito Ortiz’s first-round submission victory over Chael Sonnen, which marked the most watched Bellator fight on Spike TV in nearly a year. Later that same year, Bellator hosted its second pay-per-view ever at Madison Square Garden in New York, a card that featured Chael Sonnen defeating Wanderlei Silva, Matt Mitrione besting Fedor Emelianenko and Ryan Bader capturing the light heavyweight title from Phil Davis. In 2018, Bellator held its 200th event and conducted a yearlong Heavyweight World Grand Prix to crown a new heavyweight champion. Bellator would go on to host a similar World Grand Prix in 2018 for the welterweight title, as well as a 16-man version for the featherweight division in 2019. Recently, Cris “Cyborg” made her promotional debut at Bellator 238 in Los Angeles, capturing the women’s featherweight world title from Julia Budd in January 2020.

The Bellator MMA European Series was launched in 2018, with the first event taking place in early 2019, and airs exclusively on ViacomCBS-owned Channel 5 in the UK. In addition to numerous cities throughout the UK, the series has held live events in Ireland and Italy.

To date, Bellator has hosted over 240 live events in eight countries and 34 states.
Hired by Viacom and Spike TV in June of 2014, Scott Coker began his tenure as Bellator President at Bellator 122 on July 25. With more than 30 years promoting martial arts events, Coker is well known throughout the MMA industry as the founder and former CEO of Strikeforce MMA. His career in combat sports began as a student of acclaimed martial artist, actor and fight choreographer Ernie Reyes Sr. Coker would go on to become a seventh degree Taekwondo black belt and was an original member of Reyes' West Coast Demonstration Team.

In March 1985, Coker promoted his first fight card, serving as the San Jose promoter for the Professional Karate Association (PKA), a regulatory body for kickboxing and karate competitions. Coker helped form the International Sports Karate Association (ISKA) in 1986 and served as a director of ISKA. He later headed K-1 USA, an extension of the extremely popular Japan-based K-1 kickboxing promotion.

In 1992, Coker founded Strikeforce Kickboxing and struck a crucial deal with ESPN to air some of its events. Strikeforce evolved into a mixed martial arts promotion in 2006 and its first MMA event featuring a fight between Frank Shamrock and Cesar Gracie drew an astounding crowd of over 18,000 at the HP Pavilion in San Jose. Notably, the show also served as the first regulated MMA event in California.

In another historic moment, Strikeforce later promoted Gina Carano vs. Cris “Cyborg” in San Jose on August 15, 2009, marking the first time two women headlined a major MMA event. In April 2008, Coker increased Strikeforce’s media presence by striking a deal with NBC to air the half-hour highlight program, Strikeforce on NBC, hosted by Ken Shamrock and Lon McEachern. In 2009, Coker completed an agreement with Pro Elite, Inc to acquire the properties of the now-defunct Elite XC MMA promotion. The deal included the video library and fighter contracts, as well as the agreement between Strikeforce, CBS and Showtime Networks to produce several events per year. In 2011, Coker sold Strikeforce to the UFC in a landmark deal.


Coker’s presence provided Bellator with immediate results through his signature tent-pole live events, as well as his focus on attracting the sport’s top free agents, development of homegrown prospects and expansion into numerous international markets. Under his direction, the promotion continues to have a home in the ViacomCBS family on Paramount Network, has expanded into Bellator Kickboxing and signed a deal with the sports streaming service DAZN.
CURRENT BROADCAST PARTNERSHIPS

PARAMOUNT NETWORK (Flagship)
American Forces Network, Canada, United States

DAZN
Austria, Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, Switzerland, United States

CHANNEL 5 | PARAMOUNT NETWORK
Channel Islands, Isle of Man, United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland

EGO | EGO TOTAL
Israel

ESPN BRASIL
Brazil

EUROSPORT
Bangladesh, India, The Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka

FIGHT CHANNEL
Bosnia & Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia

GALAXY4 | ARENA4
Hungary

GOL
Andorra, Spain

iQIYI
China (Mainland)

MATCH TV | MATCH! BOETS
Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Crimea, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan

PARAMOUNT CHANNEL | MTV ASIA | SPIKE
Brunei, Cambodia, East Timor, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Laos, Macau, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pacific Islands, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea (military bases), Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam

SPIKE AUSTRALIA
Australia

SPIKE NETHERLANDS
Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands

SKY SPORT
New Zealand

SKY SPORTS
Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Ireland, United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland

SPOTV
South Korea

STAR TIMES SPORTS ARENA
Angola, Botswana, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mayotte, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Reunion, Rwanda, St. Helena and Ascension Island, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe
FLYWEIGHT (W)
ILIMA-LEI 'THE ILIMANATOR'
MACFARLANE
RECORD: 11 - 0
BORN: 04 - 02 -1990
HEIGHT: 5' 5"
FIGHTING OUT OF: San Diego, California, USA
WEIGHT CLASS: 125 lb

BANTAMWEIGHT
CURRENTLY VACANT
WEIGHT CLASS: 135 lb

FEATHERWEIGHT & LIGHTWEIGHT
PATRICIO 'PITBULL'
FREIRE
RECORD: 30 - 4
BORN: 07 - 07 - 1987
HEIGHT: 5' 8"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil
WEIGHT CLASS: 145 lb & 155 lb

FEATHERWEIGHT (W)
CRIS 'CYBORG'
JUSTINO
RECORD: 22 - 2
BORN: 07 - 09 - 1985
HEIGHT: 5' 8"
FIGHTING OUT OF: San Diego, California, USA
WEIGHT CLASS: 145 lb
WORLD TITLE CHAMPIONS

WELTERWEIGHT

DOUGLAS
'THE PHENOM'
LIMA

RECORD: 32 - 7
BORN: 01 - 05 - 1988
HEIGHT: 6' 1"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Atlanta, Georgia, USA
WEIGHT CLASS: 170 lb

MIDDLEWEIGHT

CURRENTLY VACANT

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT & HEAVYWEIGHT

RYAN
'DARTH'
BADER

RECORD: 27 - 5
BORN: 06 - 07 - 1983
HEIGHT: 6' 2"
FIGHTING OUT OF: Tempe, Arizona, USA
WEIGHT CLASS: 205 lb & 265 lb
2019 HIGHLIGHTS

SUBMISSION of the YEAR
BRENT PRIMUS
defeats TIM WILDE

SUBMISSION: GOGOPLATA
ROUND 1 | 1:20
BELLATOR BIRMINGHAM
05 - 04 - 2019

KNOCKOUT of the YEAR
DOUGLAS LIMA
defeats MICHAEL PAGE

KNOCKOUT: PUNCH
ROUND 2 | 0:35
BELLATOR 221
05 - 11 - 2019
Bellator 241 scheduled for Friday night in Connecticut has been postponed, marking the first U.S. MMA cancellation because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Bellator president Scott Coker made the announcement on Twitter Friday afternoon.

Coker announced on Thursday that the event would proceed without fans in attendance. It appears that organizers changed their minds in the aftermath of several other canceled sporting events including the NCAA tournament, The Players Championship and MLB’s spring training.

All of these decisions were made after after the NBA announced the suspension of its season Wednesday night.

DIFFERENT STRATEGY FROM UFC

The Bellator decision stands in contrast to the UFC’s approach. UFC president Dana White said on Thursday that his promotion’s events over the next month will continue. He told ESPN that the UFC made the decision after consulting with President Donald Trump, who encouraged him to move forward.

“I talked to the president and the vice president of the United States today about this,” White said. “They’re taking this very seriously. They’re saying, ‘Be cautious, be careful, but live your life and stop panicking.’”

Prior to declaring a national emergency on Friday, Trump has consistently downplayed the impact of the coronavirus while blaming media and Democrats for overhyping the pandemic.

White is a political supporter of Trump and has publicly campaigned for him.
Scott Coker of the Bellator MMA organisation outlined process behind postponing Bellator 241, and why it had to be done.

So, Bellator 241 was called off hours before the actual event was due to start. What was the process on fight day?

“These conversations started around 1pm and by 1.30pm we were shutting everything. We had to contact a small army of people to contact to let them know. I sent an email to Viacom and Showtime and DAZN.”

“There’s a lot of scrambling going on. We’ve tried to keep it as organised as possible. They didn’t know if [President] Trump was going to do another travel ban so lots have been getting on flights. Most of our staff is based in California but there are fighters from all over the world. People are panicking a bit about that. I don’t think there will be a travel ban domestically. As far as the fighters and officials, we paid everybody. We made sure they were looked after. Now it’s about trying to get all the fighters home, especially the ones in Europe. We might have to be creative to get them out. I think they can only go through London. I’m not sure.”

What now for the fight league?

“A lot of it will depend on having the ability to get tested and how long it’ll take to get the tests back. Even if you do that, you have to make sure everyone in this world has to be clean. I’d think we’d have to test all our fighters. We’ll monitor what other sports do. We’re still learning about this virus. There’s a lot of uncertainties still. We’ll follow the local testing procedures and see how it works out.”

What happens with the schedule May events in San Jose and London?

“I’m not optimistic about anything at this point. We might have to push back into the summer to continue. Things could change, hopefully. We can’t plan for the future right now when we don’t know what’s going to happen in the next couple of weeks.”

Has it been the strangest week you can remember?

“It all started on Monday. We had such an amazing press conference in New York. That feels like it was two months ago. It’s only four days ago. We announced all these great fights. Four days later we were cancelling fights. After the weigh-ins, it was all systems...
go. Then we heard NASCAR cancelled their show. We heard the President was going to make a state of emergency address. The staff were worried about how they would get home. Production people too. It changes daily and the circumstances today with the virus. we made the right call to cancel.”

What was the key decision-making for you in all this over COVID19?

“Health for our guys is No.1. The fighters aren’t happy but everyone is paid and they’ll be here to fight another day. Our staff will be here for another day. These are uncertain times. I’m not going to start panicking right now, but we made the right decision. I’m going to go back home and I think we’ll have to take a break. We’re not sure how fast this thing can move. if there will be a vaccine and if testing will improve. This tournament is now being postponed now maybe until June.

The June event has to go somewhere so the tournament might have to pushed to the end of the year. But maybe a vaccine will come in the next few weeks. As an adult I’ve never experienced anything like this.”
If you have any question about how big of a star Cris Cyborg is in the MMA world, look no further than her contract with Bellator as confirmation.

The former Strikeforce and UFC Champion will make her Bellator debut as she challenges champion Julia Budd for her title on Saturday at the Forum in Inglewood, California at Bellator 238.

Cyborg was released from her contract with UFC in 2019 after a long beef with Dana White. After a brief stint as a free agent, Cyborg signed what Bellator President Scott Coker described as an incentive-laden deal.

In fact, if Cyborg wins on Saturday and continues to stack victories, she could make millions, per Coker who spoke with The Athletic.

"This could be the single biggest contract in the history of MMA if she continues to win and takes opponents out," said Coker. "Her contract is incentivized unlike any fighter we have."

This fight could be a tough one for Cyborg. Budd is no pushover. She could be champion, or at the very least, a top contender in any organization.

If Cyborg is victorious, a possible clash with former UFC contender Cat Zingano is possible. That’s a fight that we never saw while the two were in the UFC. Injuries have always seemed to prevent Zingano from getting another opportunity at a title after she was wiped out by Ronda Rousey back in February 2015. Unfortunately for Zingano, that loss kicked off the worst section of her career.

Zingano lost three fights in a row, missed almost two years, and has lost four of her last five. Zingano hasn’t competed since her December 2018 loss to Meagan Anderson, and she turns 38 in July.

However, she does still have a name. That will likely be enough to make a fight with Cyborg, especially if Zingano can get a win in the meantime.

What Cyborg does for competition after that is a bit of a mystery. Bellator’s women’s featherweight roster is as light as other organizations. Hopefully, Bellator will work overtime to sign more formidable competition so that Cyborg can get the dance partners she needs to maximize her deal. The fight with Budd is definitely a good start.
INGLEWOOD, Calif. (AP) — Cris Justino walked through the Forum tunnels a few hours before her Bellator debut, deliberately soaking in her memories of the biggest defeat of her fighting life just 13 months ago in this arena.

And then the woman known as Cyborg started the new chapter of her career with a victory that will go a long way toward erasing those bad feelings.

Justino won the Bellator featherweight championship Saturday night, becoming the first fighter to claim title belts in four major MMA organizations with a fourth-round stoppage of Julia Budd at Bellator 238.

In her Bellator debut after seven bouts and three-plus years with the UFC, Justino (22-2) ended Budd’s eight-year winning streak and dethroned Bellator’s long-reigning 145-pound champion with brute style.

Fighting in the same arena where her 13-year unbeaten streak ended with a 51-second loss to UFC two-belt champion Amanda Nunes in December 2018, the 34-year-old Cyborg showed she hasn’t lost the quick, heavy hands that made her the best fighter in women’s mixed martial arts for much of her career.

“When I heard the fight was at the Forum, I said, ‘That’s amazing,’ ” Justino said. “That’s important for me.”

After surviving some rough early stretches and eventually asserting her physical dominance, Justino ended it with a flurry of kicks and punches on the fence. She dropped Budd for good with a blow to the body and finished on the ground 1:14 into the round, and then she jumped onto the fence to celebrate with the crowd at the famed arena south of downtown Los Angeles.

“Tha’s why I call her the greatest fighter of all time in the female divisions,” Bellator President Scott Coker said. “To stay at this level for this long, that’s a testament to her will and also her work ethic.”

Justino was a champion in Coker’s former Strikeforce promotion and the Invicta women’s MMA promotion before she finally moved to the UFC and swiftly became its first women’s featherweight champion in 2017. After losing her UFC title and leaving the promotion with acrimony last year, the Brazilian star signed with Bellator and got an immediate shot to
became the first man or woman to hold titles in four major promotions.

“For me, a belt is only a symbol,” Justino said. “I have four belts, and I hold this one today, but maybe tomorrow I won’t. If I do something nice in people’s lives, they’re going to remember that forever.”

Budd (13-3) had won 11 consecutive fights since Ronda Rousey beat her with an armbar back in 2011. The British Columbia native became Bellator’s first women’s featherweight champion in 2017 and defended the belt three times, but Cyborg was too much.

“She’s a warrior, and I knew she was going to bring it,” Budd said. “It was just the constant forward pressure that was messing me up.”

Budd actually dropped Cyborg with strikes midway through the opening round, but Cyborg escaped the jam when Budd illegally threw a knee while Cyborg was downed. After Cyborg landed better shots in a slower second round, Cyborg dropped Budd with a right hand midway through the third and controlled the rest of the round.

Justino signed with Bellator in September after her UFC contract ran out. She had won six fights in the UFC and become the promotion’s first 145-pound women’s champion, but her lone UFC loss was that spectacular thrashing from Nunes.

The defeat ended Justino’s 21-fight unbeaten streak since 2005. Nunes claimed Cyborg’s featherweight belt and made a pointed argument for her supremacy over Justino as the greatest fighter in women’s MMA history.

Justino reacted to her loss with humility and perspective, but her long-standing friction with UFC President Dana White never smoothed. One fight later, Cyborg left the UFC and signed with its biggest North American rival.

Featherweight Juan Archuleta beat Henry Corrales and a hostile crowd, earning a unanimous decision and then climbing onto the cage to make a two-handed obscene gesture at the Forum fans booing his fight for inactivity. Archuleta’s 18-fight winning streak ended last December with a decision loss to Patricio Friere.

In the co-main event, veteran Darrion Caldwell advanced in Bellator’s featherweight tournament by choking out previously unbeaten Adam Borics of Hungary in the first round. Caldwell celebrated with a backflip off the top of the 6-foot cage.

Pettis (19-5), the younger brother of former UFC champion Anthony Pettis, dropped Khashakyan with a right hand and brutalized him with punches on the ground before rendering him unconscious with a guillotine choke. Sergio Pettis hadn’t won a fight by stoppage since September 2013 in his final bout before his I4-fight UFC career began.

On the undercard, longtime UFC fighter Sergio Pettis made his Bellator debut in style with a first-round submission victory over bantamweight Alfred Khashakyan.
UNCASVILLE, Conn. – Douglas Lima stepped to the microphone at the Bellator 232 post-fight press conference beaming with joy.

And who could blame him? In Saturday night’s main event, the former welterweight champion became the current champion. Lima (32-7 MMA, 14-3 BMMA) defeated Rory MacDonald (21-6-1 MMA, 3-2-1 BMMA) in the card’s main event, which also served as the final of the welterweight grand prix tournament.

It’s been an up-and-down road for Lima. At one point he was even told by doctor’s his fighting future was cloudy and he may never compete again.

But he’s now a three-time Bellator welterweight champion, matching Michael Chandler at lightweight as the only Bellator fighters to hold the same weight-class belt three times.

Lima strode in to the presser and stood behind a podium filled with props: Two title belts, a big bottle of 50 Cent’s “Le Chemin Du Roi” champagne, and a large check for $1 million decorated the stage.

“I’m still kind of processing everything, but it feels good.” Lima said. “It feels good. I’m happy. I’m happy I got the win. I’ve got to go back and watch the fight. It wasn’t as exciting as we expected, but man. Rory is as tough as they come.

“He came in with a great game plan and moved a lot. It was a little hard to time everything, but I think we did damage. We defended the takedowns and we got the win. That’s what matters.”

The tournament victory isn’t solely a representation of three wins inside the cage. To Lima, it symbolized how far he’s come. On top of the world, Lima reflected on the times he was at rock bottom.

“(We) heard what the doctors said, ‘He’ll never be back to do this again.’ Lima said. “I think this is it… Today I’m here. Three-time world champion. I beat one of the best in the world to do it, so I’m proud of myself for that. I just thank God for everything. I’m happy.”

In one fight, Lima clinched a tournament championship, a divisional championship, and a $1 million prize. Which means the most to him? Lima said, off the top of his head, the welterweight title belt, but will wait to let the moment sink in before truly answering that question.

“Of course everyone is going to think money.” Lima said. “And if I say the belt, people are going to say I’m lying. This is important for me. Money comes and goes. I think for me that’s a bonus. Maybe it’s because it didn’t settle yet. Because I didn’t deposit it yet. It still doesn’t feel real. But this right here is real for me. This is where all the work goes into it. It’s important for me to be a champion.”

Bellator 232 took place Saturday at the Mohegan Sun Arena. The main card streamed on DAZN following prelims on MMA Junkie.
After Patricio “Pitbull” Freire defeated Juan Archuleta to retain the featherweight title in the co-main event of Bellator 228 on Saturday and complete the field for the Featherweight Grand Prix, Bellator immediately conducted a selection show to determine the quarterfinal round and set up the remainder of the tournament.

Seven of the fighters each picked a card to determine their selection order. The fighters who drew cards with Nos. 1-4 on them were allowed to choose to compete in December, January, February or March. The next three fighters got to decide whom they wanted to fight.

Freire chose last, but he didn’t have to pick a card because he was granted a “champion’s choice,” which afforded him the opportunity to face whomever he wanted at any date and possibly change the previously set matchups.

After the first seven fighters picked their dates and opponents, only Adam Borics remained to fight in January. Freire consulted with his trainer for a few moments. The fighters on stage all wanted an opportunity to fight the champion, but the Brazilian chose Pedro Carvalho. They will face off in March.

Carvalho had been set to take on Darrion Caldwell that month. Now, Caldwell, the former Bellator bantamweight champion who beat Henry Corrales earlier in the show, will take on Borics in January instead.

The remaining quarterfinal matchups include A.J. McKee—who scored the second-fastest knockout in Bellator history when he KO’d Georgi Karakhanyan in eight seconds—battling Derek Campos in December and Emmanuel Sanchez and Daniel Weichel squaring off in February. They fought at Bellator 159 in July 2016, with Weichel winning by split decision.

The winner of the Grand Prix will become the Bellator featherweight champion and be awarded $1 million.
Combat sport isn’t just about knockouts; it’s also about power—and who wields it.

This isn’t the type of power that sees the UFC fighter Francis Ngannou separate his opponents from their senses, but the power to make big things happen behind the scenes, to strike deals worth hundreds of millions of dollars, and maybe change the game forever.

Athletes like Ngannou have scary, concussive power. It’s true. But in Hollywood boardrooms there are executives in suits who have been delivering a “one-two punch” in the industry, and they want you to know all about it.

Scott Coker, the president of the MMA firm Bellator, has been trying to topple the market-leading mixed martial arts company UFC ever since he joined the Viacom-owned business in 2014. He shared the secrets to his success in building Bellator with Business Insider two years ago, explaining how he planned to close the gap between his brand and the UFC.

Business Insider most recently caught up with South Korea-born Coker at the ODEON Luxe cinema in London, ahead of one of the American’s fight events in the capital in June.

One of his newest innovations is the Bellator MMA European Series, which sees six events held every year in the UK, Ireland, and other big European cities like Milan. While Bellator has already held events in England three times in 2019, and will be at 3Arena in Dublin again in September, the UFC has held just one show in England this year, and has no plans for Ireland. It is a stark contrast.

For Coker, UFC’s apparent neglect of these territories presents a “business opportunity that UFC is not taking advantage of.”

“That’s the same all over the world for them,” he told Business Insider. “They go to Japan like once a year, then they leave. They go to Croatia once a year, then leave. Their business has been to build US pay-per-view, which has been a great business for them. Ours is completely different.

“We want to come into the market, grow the business inside the marketplace, look for local talent, do it in a time zone that works for the local population, and make it a localized event with the opportunity to be part of this global, big infrastructure.”

David Green, head of Bellator Europe and former CEO of the UK-based MMA firm BAMMA, told Business Insider: “As a territory, Europe is actually underserved by a quality MMA production. But the talent in Europe is fantastic. We’ve got great fighters, great gyms, and fans who are very knowledgeable and have a great appetite for the sport.”

Green said the whole point of the European Series is to serve the UK, Ireland, and Europe with big events that finally focuses on homegrown athletes.
Bellator wants to develop the next Conor McGregor

There is no European fighter more famous right now than Conor McGregor, even though he seldom fights and has not won a bout since 2016.

McGregor’s captivating trash talk, his status as a two-weight champion in Cage Warriors and the UFC, combined with the headlines generated from his unsuccessful professional boxing debut against unbeaten all-time great Floyd Mayweather, created an athlete as famous as Mayweather himself.

For Coker, Bellator wants to develop “the next Conor McGregor.”

He said: “There’s so much talent here in this territory and throughout Europe. We want to grow it, build it, and really nurture the next round of superstars for Bellator.”

To do that, its unique relationship with McGregor’s coach John Kavanagh, who runs the Straight Blast Gym (SBG) fight club in Dublin will be key.

“He’s got the special sauce,” Coker joked, describing Kavanagh’s success with fighters like McGregor, Artem Lobov, Frans Mlambo, Gunnar Nelson, Dillon Danis, Charlie Ward, and James Gallagher.

“He’s a great coach, and they’re not easy to find. There’s probably 80% of the MMA talent coming out of four gyms. AKA in San Jose is one. Jackson Wink in Albuquerque, two American Top Team, in Florida. There’s three. And Kavanagh is one of those guys who is producing, and will continue to produce, world-class talent.”

Green added that Kavanagh is “a very big friend of the brand,” and said there’s a “perfect storm” involving Kavanagh and McGregor, who “captured the national imagination in Ireland.”

On McGregor specifically, Green said: “He made people realize MMA was a sport you could be successful in and a sport you could earn a living from. You could be a star.

“That, with John, with the SBG in Dublin, creates a lot of young prospects – people keen to get into the sport and maybe decide to get into it rather than get into rugby, boxing, or Gaelic football.

“One of our first moves with Bellator Europe was to use that relationship with John. You see it with the likes of James Gallagher. And the Irish fans are fantastic. Dublin itself has this brilliant arena that’s right on the river, fairly central to town, and it’s just this really loud amphitheater.”

Green told Business Insider he wants Bellator to be in Dublin at least twice a year. The second Irish show of 2019 lands in September and will involve Gallagher as one of the headline attractions, fighting Cal Ellenor in a bantamweight bout.

But Gallagher is just one of many fighters Kavanagh will represent at the show.

Kavanagh told Business Insider he has “a lot of fighters” involved with Bellator, who he says is “making an impact in Europe” with its European Series.

“Without being overly dramatic, it has been really life-changing for me and the team,” he said. “There’s never before been this number of big shows around Europe. The UFC was great when it came into town but it was fairly irregular whereas now, in Ireland, we have two guaranteed cards a year. Then we have a bunch of cards in the UK and also around the rest of Europe.

“So for Europe-based fighters, the only chance they really had of making a career out of fighting was having to travel to the US all the time. Whereas now they can get enough fights to be kept busy on the European circuit.”

He added: “I’m very grateful I can have a few fights where I’m on the same time zone at home without having to adjust all the time going to the States. It’s been a great relationship so far and I hope it continues.”

And if a young, gifted fighter walked into SBG tomorrow would Kavanagh advise him or her to sign with Bellator?

“No you’re trying to get me in trouble,” he said.

“Different fighters have different needs and different wants. Some fighters are adamant that they want to be in Bellator. Others are adamant that they want to be in UFC. That’s not really my role.
“I have plenty of guys in the UFC roster. Yeah, I have to tread that line a little bit carefully about my employer somewhat. I enjoy working with both. I have a helluva lot more fighters with Bellator, more connection with Bellator. But I do have good relationships with the UFC and have some good fighters on their cards.”

When you speak to Kavanagh, it is clear: he is one part mixed martial arts and one part philosophy. In the 11 to 12 years after he founded SBG in 2002, he said the team had been ‘working hard in the background, getting our skill-level up’ because “luck is where opportunity meets preparation.”

An opportunity came along in 2013 “so we got lucky,” Kavanagh said. That opportunity was McGregor’s UFC debut.

It was a clear milestone for Kavanagh and his SBG fight club, as McGregor took just 77 seconds to obliterate Marcus Brimage at a UFC on Fuel TV event in Stockholm.

“Conor, as he says himself, kicked the door in and opened up a lot of opportunities for all of the Ireland-based fighters, whether that was on UFC or Bellator, in shows around the world. He was such a big persona, personality, and inspiration for a lot of fighters,” he said.

That night in Sweden was the catalyst for a new lease of life in his gym. Suddenly, SBG was brimming with activity. "I went from having a very small number of fighters that were fighting and being paid as professional fighters, to having a fairly large gang of 35 to 40 fighters between UFC and Bellator," he said.

Now there is, Green said. And as well as Kavanagh’s SBG, Green is excited to unearth more talent from London Shootfighters, home to current Bellator star Michael “Venom” Page, and Nottingham’s Spirit Dojo, owned by battle-hardened veteran Paul Daley.

"There’s gyms all over Europe, as well as UK and Ireland, where the talent is exceptional and getting better all the time," Green said.

"Stockholm has one of the biggest concentrations of MMA gyms in the world. Sweden has huge amateur success and the country excels and punches above its weight. So you’ve got places like that. You’ve obviously got Holland.

Green also said “there’s some killers” in Russia, too. But while Russia is not in the company’s short-term plan, “our movement into Europe will undoubtedly creep in that direction sooner or later.”

It all creates a “fully rounded MMA scene,” Green said. It is a scene where the top talents can be provided with a platform that, for Coker, is the best in the entire business.

Bellator has distribution deals with Paramount and DAZN in the US. and Channel 5 and Sky Sports in the UK. The Sky Sports agreement means fighters will not only be showcasing their skills on fight night, but will also be present during segments on the Sky Sports News channel, and be written about on the broadcaster’s website, SkySports.com.

"The distribution between Sky Sports and Channel 5 in the UK and the Virgin deal in Ireland means we have the best distribution in all MMA of any company in this territory," Coker told Business Insider. "No one has a better distribution deal, not even the UFC.

"To be on terrestrial television and Sky Sports, we have a one-two punch right now, and it’s a good feeling."

Green added that Bellator’s presence on Sky Sports brings legitimacy to the brand and to the sport, as they had not previously embraced MMA. “We’re about building the sport as well as building Bellator,” he said.

Bellator’s next event is the Bellator 225 show scheduled for August 24 in Connecticut, but returns to Europe the following month with its Irish extravaganza.

Coker said, “If you look at the commitment to growing the fanbase, we’re here for the long haul. Come watch our shows. It’s a completely different and great fan experience. And if you can’t come in, watch on TV. Bellator is here to stay.”}
Former England rugby union international James Haskell has signed a deal to fight with mixed martial arts promotion Bellator MMA.

The 34-year-old is expected to make his debut as a heavyweight next year.

The former Wasps and Northampton Saints flanker, who won 77 caps for England, retired from rugby in May.

Haskell has previously trained with British MMA fighter Michael ‘Venom’ Page and worked as a television pundit covering MMA.

Bellator say 6ft 4in Haskell will continue his training this year with his first fight “expected to take place during the first half of 2020”.

Haskell says his interest in MMA goes back a decade and in an interview during his rugby career said it “builds strength and endurance and has helped me to manipulate and move people on the rugby pitch”.

He told Jioie at the time that he would “like to compete” in MMA and that it commands similar discipline to rugby.

Haskell played in the past two World Cups and won three Six Nations with England, including the Grand Slam in 2016.

But he struggled with ankle and toe problems while playing for Northampton last season and announced his decision to retire after a 17-year professional career in May.
Bellator President Scott Coker spent time during the coronavirus pandemic like so many others, binging on Netflix and catching up on "Tiger King."

"That’s a crazy show," Coker said.

Coker would love for mixed martial arts fans to catch up on his style of cage fighting in the promotion he runs through Bellator’s app or its YouTube channel. But live fights, right now in this climate?

Hard pass.

Bellator has postponed all fights until the Bellator 242 card on May 9 that features Ryan Bader defending the light heavyweight championship against Vadim Nemkov in San Jose, California. Even that event could be in jeopardy after President Donald Trump extended federal guidelines recommending people stay home for another 30 days, until the end of April, to prevent the spread of the virus Bellator’s next big card could go down for the count.

"I feel like the right thing to do is wait," Coker said. "When the state of California says, ‘You’re good to go,’ when we get a call from (the California State Athletic Commission) that says you’re good to go, then we’ll go. I think we’re waiting for the green light from the government."

Coker had considered running its March 16 card with a Patricio “Pitbull” Freire – Pedro Carvalho Bellator 241 main event at Mohegan Sun Arena in Connecticut without fans until he decided to postpone the card. It has not yet been rescheduled.

"We’ll make up these fights," Coker said. "If we miss any other fights while we’re waiting, we’ll make them up."

With 241 in doubt, Bellator went ahead and paid all fighters, officials, judges, crew and any essential personnel connected to the card.

"It was quite expensive, well into the seven figures," Coker said. "Revenue you can make up, and that’s what we’re going to do. I think there will be an impact, even if we make up these events."

Bellator, owned by Viacom, also has a card scheduled for May 16 in London.

"I feel like there’s a possibility everything will be fine by the end of April," Coker said. "If it’s not, then we’ll have to push the fights back. That’s a tough call. We’ll have to let them know in the next couple of weeks, here’s our backup plan."

UFC has since held a card Brazil and company president Dana White has been adamant the company will still hold its next pay-per-view event in an undetermined locale on April 18. The main event fight between Khabib Nurmagomedov and Tony Ferguson was originally scheduled for Brooklyn. UFC had hoped to move two events, scheduled for March 28 and April 11, to its UFC Apex training complex in Las Vegas, where they would have been held without fans. They failed to go off as scheduled.

"I’m not one to judge their business, but I just hope they’re taking precautions and all the proper steps because, to me, it’s always been about the health and safety and well being of the athletes and the staff," Coker said. "One of the decisions we made when we pulled the plug was the ‘What if?’ What if we continue and two or three of these fighters ended up with the coronavirus on our watch? It would become very real, very quickly."