

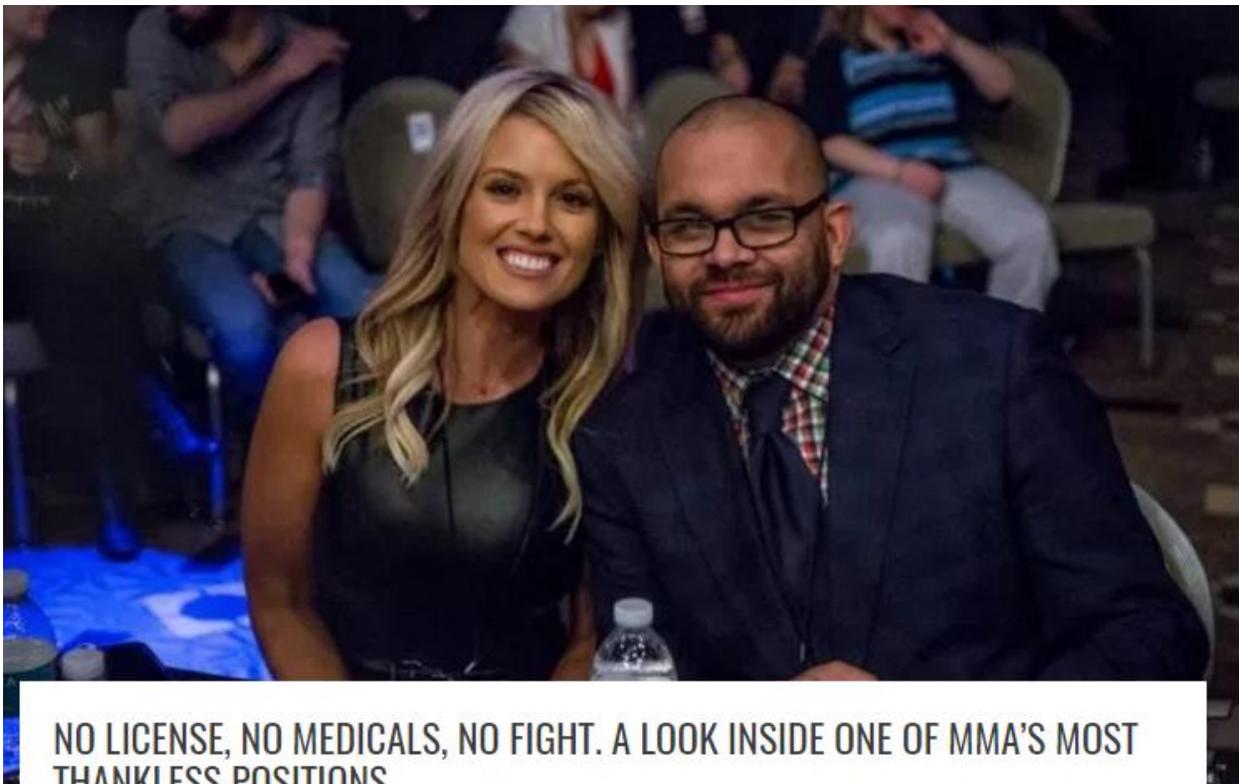


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**NO LICENSE, NO MEDICALS, NO FIGHT. A LOOK INSIDE ONE OF MMA'S MOST
THANKLESS POSITIONS**

No license, no medicals, no fight. A look inside one of MMA's most thankless positions

When fight fans pack an arena to watch their favorite mixed martial artists compete inside the cage, one of the last things on their minds is the processes involved in making the event happen. Their attention and focus is on the fun-filled evening that is about to go down; the lights, the music, the fighters and their stories, but more importantly the action. After all, the fights are what they are there to see.

Just as in most every production, there are many behind the scenes jobs that often get overlooked, but there is one extremely crucial aspect to mixed martial arts regulation and sanctioning that cannot be overlooked. Licensing and medicals go hand-in-hand.

Without the proper paperwork in place, a state's athletic commission has the right and authority to prevent any fight or entire event from happening. While most smaller promotions do not have individuals solely appointed to ensuring the process is streamlined, some of the more prevalent ones do.

Meet Melissa Skowronski

Melissa is the Director of Medicals and Licensing at one of the largest and most popular mixed martial arts promotions in the United States, Cage Fury Fighting Championships (CFFC) in New Jersey.



Melissa Skowronski and CFFC matchmaker, Arias Garcia – Photo by Manny Fernandes (Mdphotoandink) for CFFC.

Her position is a thankless one; often never entering the mindset of the casual fight fan, but she understands that. She too says that first and foremost she is a “fight fan.”

Skowronski is the former Co-Owner/Director at Pellegrino Mixed Martial Arts and Fitness Academy.

“I have managed fighters since 2003. Working with the UFC, Bellator, and regional promotions for over 10 years, medicals and licensing was just something I was always good at,” Skowronski said.

“I established a good relationship with the commissioner in New Jersey, Nick Lembo, after years of managing fighters in New Jersey shows. I managed George Sullivan, former CFFC champion and current UFC fighter, and developed close ties with CFFC staff. When Robert Haydak, former CFFC president and current President of Alliance MMA, reached out to me about taking over the medical and licensing role I happily accepted,” she said.

Natural Progression

“I was definitely open to the role – I like the business and I’ve been a fight fan for years. Growing up my family were all boxing fans and I was at numerous fights as a teenager with my dad. I have always been a fight fan, and somewhat tied into the fight business. It was just a natural progression for me to become involved behind the scenes.

“I began working for CFFC in October 2015. My role is to make sure all the fighters are medically cleared and licensed for each of our events. First I contact the commission and see what every fighter on our card needs to be approved to fight in New Jersey, or in Pennsylvania because we promote shows in Philadelphia as well,” Skowronski said.

“Actually, we have our first show in San Diego in March so now I’m working with the California commission as well.”

Cage Fury Fight Championships heads west for the first time when they arrive in sunny California, for CFFC 64, March 26. The new location means working with a new athletic commission. In this instance, Skowronski will be working with one of the most respected and well known Executive Officers in Andy Foster.

“We are just in the infancy stages with the California paperwork. Even though it is a new commission for us, I don’t foresee any problems. It is going to be a professional and amateur card.”

What is involved?

“I make sure that ever fighter has all the required licensing paperwork completed, all medical appointments are set and all results are sent to me before I submit everything to the commission by their deadline,” Skowronski said.



Melissa Skowronski, Burt Watson, and CFFC President Devon Mathiesen – Photo by Manny Fernandes (Mdphotoandink) for CFFC.

“Amateurs are a little easier to deal with because they do not need much, just a physical, blood work, and other pretty straight forward evaluations. Professionals require more and depending on the state and the circumstances, requirements can be extensive. New Jersey is one of the most thorough commissions I’ve worked with, so it’s very important to be on top of each fighter to get everything submitted in a timely matter.”

Challenges

“I’d say the biggest challenge I face is getting all the fighters to submit their results to me on time. A lot of guys like to wait until fight week to submit their medicals and sometimes there are issues that arise. Sometimes they submit the wrong exams or the wrong bloodwork tests, and if we’re near the deadline this could be a major problem and effect the entire event. If proper medicals are not submitted to the commission on time, the bout will be cancelled. I have constant communication with fighters and managers so that I can to avoid any last minute surprises. I fully understand a fighter’s main priority is to train and focus and medicals are an annoyance. I get it, but in reality, it is what makes or breaks the fight so they have to get the correct forms in on time.”

“There are other challenging requirements as well. If a fighter is over 40 years old in New Jersey they require more medical exams. Another hurdle is if a fighter does not have health insurance. Some of these guys are fighters working part time jobs. Some guys have no cost out of pocket, but some do not have insurance and have to pay for these expensive tests out of pocket. Some of the results do last 6 months, a year, and some last three years, but it’s always an out of pocket expense for the fighters so we work with them as best we can.”

Working under Pressure

“There is always one fight that comes down to the final hour in getting the paperwork filed by the deadline. We just had one this past event, CFFC 63, where a fighter submitted his exams and there were some abnormalities so he had to go back to the doctors for more tests and get clearance from specialists. Sometimes it takes an army to get the fighter in the cage. I worked closely with this fighter’s wife and she helped to get him to the appointments and complete the process. It came down to the last hour, but we got it done.

“It can be a little stressful. I live in Point Pleasant, New Jersey with my two children but I also commute for a full time finance job located in both New York and Red Bank, New Jersey. I’m all over the place. The week before fight week is always the most stressful. I’m a fast paced person, but trying to get everything done fight week is busy. If I didn’t have anything to do I would be bored.”

Future Endeavors

“CFFC was recently acquired by Alliance MMA, the largest group of regional mixed martial arts (MMA) sports organizations in the U.S., and I definitely see myself being involved down the road for sure,” Skowronski said.

“I would love to be involved for the remainder of my career. While I enjoy the medicals and licensing aspect, I don’t know in what capacity I will continue to be involved in. I’m really

excited about the acquisition and being a part of Alliance MMA has really opened up doors and presented many opportunities. I'm definitely excited to see Alliance MMA to continue to grow, but my heart and involvement will always be with Cage Fury."

<https://mymmanews.com/melissa-skowronski-cffc/>