

Mike Dolce: The Art of Losing Weight

One of the leading MMA nutritionists shares his thoughts on the right way to lose weight.

By Mark Gillespie

Cutting weight has long been ingrained in the culture of professional combat sports. Today the vast majority of fighters still seek to exploit the day before weigh-ins and by cutting weight, give themselves a clear size and strength advantage over their opponents. Believe it or not, some fighters worry more about making weight than they do about their opponent. Cutting weight can undoubtedly be a cruel process and it's no secret that it isn't always undertaken in the most professional manner. Some athletes will practically starve themselves, use saunas or sweat suits and some have even taken drugs amongst other drastic measures in order to reach their goals.

The Dolce View

One man who is well acquainted with the process of cutting weight is Mike Dolce. Dolce, a Las Vegas based nutritionist who also describes himself as a longevity coach, is regularly hired to assist elite mixed martial artists with their cut. Vitor Belfort, Gray Maynard, Rampage Jackson and Johny Hendricks are just some of the world-class fighters who have reaped the rewards of Dolce's expertise in recent years. Dolce's interest in nutrition is a longstanding one and originally evolved alongside his own athletic pursuits as a wrestler, powerlifter and mixed martial artist. Here he gives an introductory overview regarding his philosophy on the art of cutting weight.

“Really there's no magic pill,” says Dolce. “It's about maintaining a professional approach, not just in the build up to a fight but throughout an athlete's entire career. It's that blue-collar mind-set and making simple healthy choices. Three weeks before the fight my fighters are at about 7% body fat and throughout the entire process remain the epitome of perfect health. It's all done in cycles, three weeks, six weeks, nine weeks, setting goals for each week. I call it 'skewing'. I tell my athletes they're skewing in the right direction and that we're always getting better day-by-day.”

‘The art of cutting weight is a matter of peaking. It’s a very scientific process but in general, I try to bring a healthy and practical approach. So many fighters look dreadful on the scales because they’re so dehydrated. Unlike some others, my fighters stay hydrated throughout the entire process of cutting. The day of the weigh-in is never going to be easy, no matter what. However, the day before the weigh-in, the fighter should be fine.’

According to Dolce, the process of cutting weight remains stigmatised because of the somewhat primitive methods that are still in use.

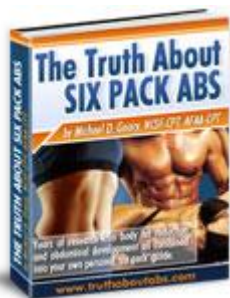
The Wrong Way to Cut Weight

‘It’s unfortunate that the art of cutting weight hasn’t evolved much in the history of professional combat sports. The sports themselves have evolved whether it’s Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu or western boxing but cutting weight for many is still seen as a crude process. Take Brandon Rios (lightweight boxer) for example. He turns up to press conferences in plastic suits. Can you believe it? Two days before a fight and he’s still wearing those plastic suits to try and sweat it out.’

Ultimately for Dolce, a healthy weight cut is about more than what happens in the weeks leading up to a fight. The choices made in between camps are crucial, not only to the weight cut itself, but so that combat athletes can make the most out of what is essentially a very short career. He uses the example of two world-class boxers to highlight the consequences of positive and negative lifestyle choices.

‘Take Ricky Hatton for example. He was an extremely gifted and capable athlete whose career ended too soon because he didn’t take care of his body in between fights.’ Hatton, the former light-welterweight champion who retired recently at the age of thirty-three was infamous for his massive weight-gain in between fights. ‘Then you have a guy like Bernard Hopkins at the other end of the scale,’ says Dolce. ‘He’s forty-eight years old, takes great care of his body and as a result is still competing at the highest level and could be fighting well into his fifties.’ In fact, just days after this interview, the forty-eight year old Hopkins won the IBF light-heavyweight crown against the thirty-one year old Tavoris Cloud. In doing so he broke his own record to become once again, the oldest man in boxing history to win a major world title.

In an ideal world as espoused by Mike Dolce, combat athletes would incorporate cutting weight into their everyday lives whether there’s a fight coming up or not. It’s a tough ask for those who like to kick back in between fights but look at Bernard Hopkins and Dolce’s message is clear. Discipline and dedication are much more than just sports clichés – they’re the building blocks of future victories.



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