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Strikeforce: Santiago, Overeem and Le Win

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SAN JOSE, Calif., Nov. 16 -- [Jorge Santiago \(Pictures\)](#) stopped [Trevor Pranglely \(Pictures\)](#) midway through the opening round to capture the first sanctioned mixed martial arts tournament in the state of California.

The road to the finals in front of 8,233 fans inside the HP Pavilion was a rough one for the battle-tested middleweights.

In the four-man tournament's opening bout, [Sean Salmon \(Pictures\)](#), who replaced Japan's [Yuki Sasaki \(Pictures\)](#) after he failed to gain medical clearance from the California State Athletic Commission and was thusly denied a license to fight, was victim of a scary knockout just 24 seconds after the opening bell that could endanger his career.

Moving around the cage Santiago, 27, launched into the air and connected with a right knee to Salmon's neck. The Ohioan, reminiscent of his iconic knockout loss in the UFC to [Rashad Evans \(Pictures\)](#), was out instantly. He crashed to the canvas and absorbed an additional punch before referee Cecil Peoples intervened.

"He's a wrestler so I was trying to set up for some back and side kicks," Santiago said. "As soon as I saw him drop his head down I went right away for the flying knee."

Salmon (14-5-0) lay motionless on the canvas before suffering what CSAC executive officer Armando Garcia called a small seizure. Paramedics strapped Salmon, who attempted to stand on weak legs after regaining consciousness, on a stretcher and transported him to Valley Medical Center, located some 20 minutes from the arena.

"He is immediately suspended," Garcia said of the 30-year-old Salmon. "People get knocked out all the time, but they don't go into a seizure. He's done -- that's the general consensus."

Arriving at the hospital, Salmon, who was scheduled to fight Dec. 15 in Dallas, Texas, against [Jason Miller](#), was alert and walking under his own power, Garcia said. A CT scan didn't reveal any bleeding on the brain.

"I was a little worried about him, if he was OK or not," said Santiago, who went backstage and waited for the winner between South African bruiser [Trevor Pranglely \(Pictures\)](#) and Hawaii's [Falaniko Vitale \(Pictures\)](#). "They said he was OK so I just came back to the locker room, cooled down and prepared my mind for the next fight."

Pranglely muscled the smaller Vitale, 35, by landing hard knees in the clinch that put the Hawaiian on his heels. Vitale, like Pranglely a UFC veteran, found his range and connected with repeated punches that bloodied the large middleweight's face.

In the second period Pranglely forced himself on Vitale, now 24-8, connecting with thudding punches to the body and excellent knees inside the clinch.

During one exchange, Vitale flinched and covered his right eye, prompting referee Marcos Rosales to intervene. After being checked by the ringside physician, it was determined Vitale could not continue because his eye was spasming. (His vision later returned and he said he was fine.)

The bout went to the scorecards and was deemed a majority draw -- Nelson Hamilton 19-19; Cecil Peoples 19-19; Dan Stell 20-18 for Vitale -- forcing the decision based upon CSAC tournament rules to fall on the shoulders of Rosales, who raised the 35-year-old Pranglely's hand.

With Santiago's dream opening-round tournament fight and Pranglely being put through his paces, the two met relatively unscathed in the finals.

"I've been studying his game for a long time," Santiago said of Pranglely, whom he first encountered on a Bodog-promoted event. "I knew he's a tough guy and he would try to put me down and drop some bombs. I just did my game, the best time to go and I took over."

It was obvious early that Prangley, 17-5, did not like Santiago's kicks to his lead leg. After taking a right hand to the jaw that knocked him back, Prangley was wiped off his feet by one such kick. Another swing of the legs saw Santiago blast Prangley to the midsection.

Later in the round Santiago, 16-7, again went after Prangley to the body, this time with a knee. He followed with another to the chin that felled the chiseled South African. A final right hand motivated referee Jon Schorle to call a stop to the contest at 2:31 of the first.

The tournament alternate bout saw [Dennis Hallman \(Pictures\)](#) defeat late replacement [Jeremiah Metcalf \(Pictures\)](#), who stepped in for Salmon when it was deemed Sasaki could not participate.

After being stuffed on a double-leg, Hallman transitioned to an attack on Metcalf's left leg, locking in a textbook heelhook and forcing a tapout at 1:39 of round one.

Overeem topples Buentello

[Alistair Overeem \(Pictures\)](#) mixed in strikes with takedowns and a potent submission game to finish [Paul Buentello \(Pictures\)](#) in capturing the first ever Strikeforce heavyweight title.

Though most fans expected a slugfest, Overeem showed his hand early by planting the 250-pound Buentello on his back.

"I'm a striker myself," Overeem said, "but I knew my ground game was better and my all-around game was better, so I took advantage of that."

The 27-year-old Dutch veteran, who made his name fighting in the PRIDE Fighting Championships, challenged Buentello from dominant positions. Several times Overeem endangered Buentello's neck, most notably with a side-choke/neck crank he invented in the gym called an "Alistene."

"[Paul Buentello \(Pictures\)](#) is a tough guy," said Overeem, now 26-11. "He didn't tap. I don't even think he was bothered by it, so I need to work on that one."

Standing a ripped 224 pounds, Overeem looked massive compared to the frame he carried during his bouts at 205 pounds.

In the fight's first five minutes, Buentello (23-10) absorbed a ton of punishment, and only his stellar defense of guillotine chokes saved him. Each judge at cage-side scored the opening period 10-8 for Overeem.

The San Jose-based Buentello, 33, came out winging punches in the second, but he failed to stay on his feet long enough to catch Overeem with anything, including his most dangerous weapon: the uppercut

When action returned to the feet, Overeem attacked Buentello's soft belly with a knee to the liver and another directly to the midsection.

"I was working his head, and he can take a shot on the head," Overeem said. "But at the same time I was working his body and I could see that that had more affect. Once I got the knee on the liver I could see he almost went down -- that was before I gave him elbows to the body -- and I immediately gave him another knee to the liver and that was it."

The former King of the Cage champion doubled over in immense pain and tapped the canvas to get out of the fight.

"This belt is mine and it's going to be with me in Holland," Overeem said. "It's going to stay with me for a long time."

[Cung Le \(Pictures\)](#) impresses again

Hand it to San Jose's [Cung Le \(Pictures\)](#): He knows how to put on a show.

For the fifth time in five fights the 34-year-old fighter showed different areas of his evolving MMA game, this time during a third round stoppage over "The Ultimate Fighter 2" participant [Sam Morgan \(Pictures\)](#).

The dynamic Le displayed a variety of takedowns -- several of which were the high-risk variety -- throughout the fight, more than he employed in his previous four efforts combined.

Morgan, 26, helped in that department but rushing wildly at Le, who established top position in side-

control but failed to finish the bout due in large part to his lack of experience on the canvas.

In the third round, Le dropped Morgan (19-9) with a short right hook. The partisan crowd offered "Bloodsport" type chants of "Cung Le! Cung Le! Cung Le!" as the Vietnamese fighter allowed Morgan to stand.

The end came when a vicious kick to the liver sent Morgan sprawling to the canvas at 1:58 of the final round.

Morgan was sent to Valley Medical Center for observation overnight after he vomited uncontrollably following the fight, Garcia told Sherdog.com.

Undercard fights

Popular local product [Brian Schwartz](#), a champion full-contact fighter, failed to get past [Lemont Davis](#) in his MMA debut. After three rounds, all three judges saw it 29-28 for Davis, who traveled to San Jose without a corner.

Strikeforce light heavyweight champion [Bobby Southworth \(Pictures\)](#) lost a non-title affair to 30-year-old [Anthony Ruiz \(Pictures\)](#). After a strong first round in which Southworth (8-5) dropped Ruiz and took his back, the veteran out of American Kickboxing Academy took a monster four-punch combination to the chin that put him down.

Referee Marcos Rosales moved in to have a cut above 37-year-old Southworth's left eye checked, prompting the doctor at ringside to call the fight 54 seconds of round two. Ruiz moved his record to 18-10.

Twenty-seven-year-old [Luke Stewart \(Pictures\)](#) needed just 19 seconds to dispatch [Bryson Kamaka \(Pictures\)](#) in a welterweight clash.

Kamaka (5-9) rushed forward with punches before being met with a knee to the chin that put him down. A follow up knee to the head by Stewart (5-0) would have been illegal had referee Cecil Peoples not already called the contest. Because the fight was deemed over, said CSAC's Garcia, the result stands.

[Eric Lawson \(Pictures\)](#) battled through a perilous opening three minutes against [Josh Neal \(Pictures\)](#) to score an early second-round stoppage. Lawson (4-1) walked back to his corner on wobbly legs after being trapped in a Neal triangle choke for nearly the entire first period.

However the momentum Neal, 2-2, seized in the first was erased with a counter right hand. Lawson went down and was immediately caught in a rear-naked choke that forced him to tap 20 seconds into the middle round.

A rough and tumble bantamweight bout between [Pete Sabala \(Pictures\)](#) and [Anthony Figueroa \(Pictures\)](#) saw the crowd burst out for the first time. Three three-minute rounds were punctuated by Sabala's high-elevation takedowns and Figueroa's strikes, which hurt his 137-pound opponent several times during the fight.

In the end, judges at ringside disagreed on the decision. Cecil Peoples (29-28) and Dan Stell (30-27) gave it to Figueroa (4-1), while Nelson "Doc" Hamilton saw it 29-28 for Sabala, who fell to 2-5.

Lightweights [Clint Coronel \(Pictures\)](#) and [Alex Crispin \(Pictures\)](#) engaged in a sub-par contest that had the crowd voicing its dissatisfaction during several points in the bout. Crispin's wrestling control was enough against an inactive Coronel (2-4) to take the three-round fight by unanimous decision (30-27, 29-28, 29-28).

An accidental strike to the head of [Chris Drumm](#) prompted referee Cecil Peoples to stop the bout at 2:35 of the second period and deduct a point from [Evan Esguerra \(Pictures\)](#).

Because the physician at cage-side deemed the pro debuting Drumm could not continue and since the bout had not finished two complete rounds, rules dictated a technical draw decision. The featherweights had waged a competitive bout up to that point.

