

UFC on ESPN+ 27: Benavidez vs. Figueiredo (for the vacant 125lbs Men's Flyweight Belt)

Flyweight Joseph Benavidez vs. Deiveson Figueiredo

I've said it before, but I will say it once more...I am so glad the UFC Men's Flyweight Division is still intact. There are some great athletes in this division that have showcased a lot of talent including these two featured fighters. This will be Joe Benavidez's third chance to become the champion of this division (the first two were against Demetrious Johnson. The first time by split decision loss and the second time was a KO loss) and he will be facing a worthy (and dangerous) opponent in Deiveson Figueiredo to compete for this vacant belt. Joe is the better round-winner in my opinion as he fights at the higher pace, has the superior cardio, is the superior wrestler, and is the superior scrambler. Deiveson is the more dangerous finisher given that he has a lot of power in his hands and is a high level BJJ practitioner (though I do not expect him to submit Benavidez who has never been submitted, is a great grappler, and is an excellent scrambler). Deiveson is not active enough of a striker for me to feel that he can win rounds unless he hurts Benavidez with a counter as Benavidez enters the pocket (Benavidez was knocked down by Cejudo and Sergio Pettis. Also, knocked out by Demetrious Johnson). Deiveson waits for his opponents to enter the pocket so he can time a counter in order to do damage. As evidenced by his fights against Jarred Brooks and Jussier Formiga, Deiveson can soundly be outwrestled, so that is likely the path of least resistance here for Joe, but if he does not wrestle, Joe can win rounds by avoiding serious damage from Deiveson and being the more effective and busier striker. Ultimately, I am siding with Joe to win, but Deiveson's power combined with his counterstriking precision make him live to win by finish if he can catch Joe entering the pocket off guard.

For DraftKings: This is an obvious fight to target as the winner of this fighter should score well. Also, both fighters are reasonably priced. Even though I am siding with Joe (\$8,800), I will certainly have some exposure to Deiveson (\$7,400) considering I think he has to win this fight by finish in order to get his hand raised.

Women's Featherweight Felicia Spencer vs. Zarah Fairn dos Santos

Felicia Spencer is the biggest favorite on this card by a landslide (currently -800 per 5Dimes), so I will be sure to make this breakdown concise. In October 2019 (at UFC 243), Zarah fought Megan Anderson (also fighting on this card) and she was taken down and mounted by Anderson (who was submitted in the first round by Spencer in Spencer's UFC debut) which to me showed her defensive grappling and wrestling is going to be a huge liability for her in this fight considering Felicia Spencer is a BJJ black belt, is really slick at taking the back, and is strong in the clinch (was able to have success clinching against Cyborg). It is hard for me to assume that Zarah's defensive grappling has significantly improved in just a few months. Zarah's submission loss to Anderson was from Anderson's guard AFTER Zarah reversed Anderson on the mat. Felicia is the superior wrestler and grappler here by a wide margin which is why the odds are very wide. Zarah is a long striker, but Felicia showed great durability and toughness against

Cris Cyborg (a very threatening and aggressive striker) and Spencer is credentialed is Taekwondo, so I don't see Zarah having much success while the fight is standing.

*Against Megan Anderson, Zarah was mounted in the first round.



For DraftKings: Felicia (\$9,400) will be an obvious play, but she is very safe to win and has a lot of upside with her wrestling, grappling, and finishing potential. I will fade Zarah (\$6,800).

Light Heavyweight Ion Cuțelaba vs. Magomed Ankalaev

Too much too soon for Magomed Ankalaev? Magomed Ankalaev is a good prospect that has showcased technical striking, power in his hands (i.e. hurt Abreu and Lungiambula), and takedown capabilities. I noticed Ankalaev can be very passive in striking exchanges, can be taken down (twice by Paul Craig), and does not utilize proper head movement which resulted in his leg buckling on a punch from Klidson Abreu. I believe Ion Cuțelaba will test Magomed in the areas where he has looked most vulnerable inside the octagon. For starters, **Cutelaba pushes the much higher pace in the striking exchanges, is the much more mobile fighter, and is VERY durable (has never been knocked out in 20 professional MMA fights which includes bouts with dangerous strikers such as Khalil Rountree and Jared Cannonier).** I do not think one fighter has a significant advantage here in terms of technique, so I favor Cutelaba in the striking exchanges for these **reasons.** In terms of the wrestling, it's concerning Paul Craig was able to take down Ankalaev twice albeit he did not control him for a long time, but something worth noting nonetheless because Cutelaba comes from a Sambo background and has showcased solid offensive wrestling in the UFC thus far when it makes sense to in respect to the matchup (i.e. versus Rountree – landed four takedowns and Cannonier – landed 6 takedowns). So Cutelaba has opportunities to takedown Ankalaev although he may just use his wrestling defensively to keep the fight standing where he will have the advantage. Cutelaba's liabilities are in his cardio and his submission defense (when he's tired). However, I do not see them being exposed in this matchup considering how passive Ankalaev is (Cutelaba should be able to control the pace) and the fact he has not shown to be a submission threat (does not have a single professional MMA win by SUB). I feel as though Cutelaba is being significantly overrated here (hence the bet) and should win this matchup.

*Ankalaev getting taken down by Craig in his UFC debut



For DraftKings: I will fade Ankalaev (\$9,000). Cutelaba (\$7,200) is a live underdog that should win, but if he does not win by finish, I do not see him putting up a very high score. That said, I can see Cutelaba finishing this fight, so I will have some DK exposure.

Women's Featherweight Megan Anderson vs. Norma Dumont Viana

The UFC just added another fighter in the Women's Featherweight when they signed UFC debutant, Norma Dumont Viana. I will preface, there is very limited footage of Norma, so what I am about to say is what I've seen over just a few minutes of fight film. With all that said, Norma can pull off this upset in her UFC debut against, Megan Anderson. Norma looks to be a very good grappler as I've seen footage of her in Brazilian Ju Jitsu competition and it has translated well in MMA as she looks to take the fight to the mat, advance position, and look to get the submission. Norma is also looking fast, athletic, and a decent striker (that utilizes leg kicks which can work to her advantage against a lengthier, Megan Anderson). The reason why I will not bet Norma is because she is very inexperienced in MMA (4-0), has not fought the level of competition as Anderson, nor I am unsure of if she will have success wrestling against Anderson who will be 5 inches taller than her (I also not think Anderson's takedown defense is

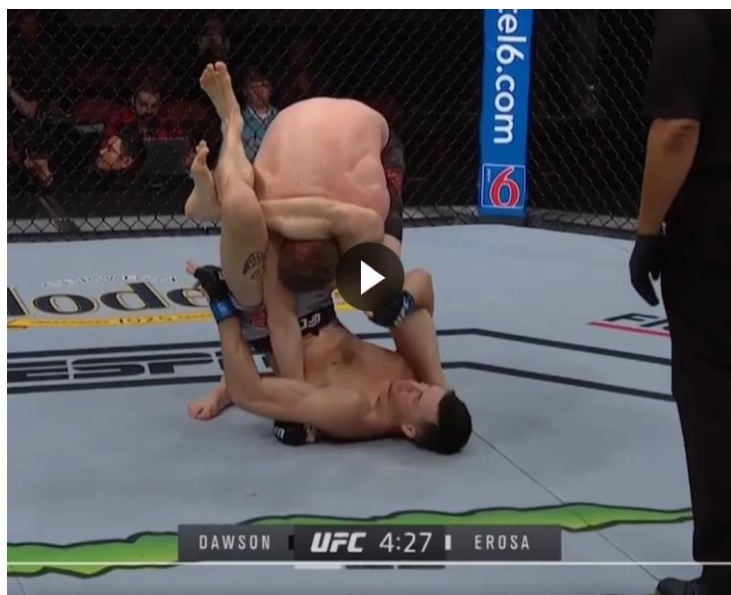
bad though she can be taken down as evidenced by the Holly Holm and Felicia Spencer fights). Besides the experience and length advantages (with both height and reach), Anderson will likely be walking Norma down trying to pursue the finish as Anderson is a threatening striker due to her length and power. Anderson's best chance to win this fight is by standing because even though I know she's improving her Brazilian Ju Jitsu, I think the grappling advantage is still strongly in favor of Norma. I think Anderson will be the favorite in the striking based exchanges in this fight, but Norma's speed, athleticism, utilization of leg kicks, and showing to be a decent striker mean to me that it will not be a complete mismatch. IF Norma, can get this fight to the mat and end up in top position, she will have a massive advantage as Anderson's defensive grappling has proved to be a massive liability (had her guard passed excessively by Holly Holm, submitted in the first round by Felicia Spencer, and reversed on the mat by Zarah Fairn dos Santos). Holly Holm and Felicia Spencer where able to get Anderson to the mat, but it is yet to be seen if Norma can... I will side with Anderson, but an upset here would not surprise me given the clear path to victory for Dumont Viana.

For DraftKings: I think this is a solid fight to target with my preferred play being Norma Dumont Viana (\$7,100) due to the discount on the DK salary, grappling, wrestling, and finishing upside. Megan Anderson (\$9,100) can earn a finish if Norma is not ready to compete in the UFC sustainably yet, so for that reason she is in play.

Featherweight Grant Dawsonvs. Darrick Minner

Veteran of the sport, Darrick Minner will be making his UFC debut on short notice of a few weeks against prospect, Grant Dawson. Minner was Herbert Burns' opponent on the Dana White's Tuesday Night Contender Series and after a back and forth fight where Minner took Burn's back, Minner was submitted by Burns. That fight turned out to be the complexion of how Minner likes to fight as he is an "all or nothing" type of fighter as he likes to brawl, is a very aggressive grappler, prefers to go for the submission (guillotine choke a lot) over a favorable position on the mat, and has noticeably gassed in fights due to this style. As evidenced by the first image below, Dawson was caught in a submission attempt from Julian Erosa's guard in his UFC debut, so Minner's dangerous guard may be a threat early for Dawson, but other than that threat, the odds (+335 currently per 5Dimes) of Minner winning are justified. Dawson has the much better cardio (and cardio management), is the better wrestler (I've seen Minner taken down and put in bad spots on the mat as evidenced by the 2nd and 3rd picture below) and fights more optimally than Minner. Minner's primary paths to victory are to either catch Dawson with a big shot if these two brawls since Dawson does not take his head off the center line (as evidenced by his fight against Mike Trizano) or get an early submission from guard. Other than those to unlikely scenarios, Dawson can really dominate this fight which I expect him to.

*Dawson getting threatened from Julian Erosa's guard



*Minner getting his back taken



*Minner was mounted



For DraftKings: I think Grant Dawson (\$9,300) is an excellent play like Felicia Spencer (\$9,400) due to his wrestling, grappling, and finishing upside. I would rather target Darrick Minner (\$6,900) than Zarah Fairn dos Santos (6,800).

Lightweight Luis Peña vs. Steve Garcia

Two long strikers are featured here. I will note this is the first opponent other than Mike Trizano, who's listed at 5'11', that Peña has faced in the UFC that will be near his height and reach (though he still has both advantages there). This is worth noting because I feel like Peña leverages his significant length over his opponents to his advantage in a lot of his fights in not just striking but grappling too such as the sequence below against Matt Frevola that happened in a few seconds.



Peña's length will play a role here, but I do not expect it to be by a significant margin such as in the above sequence considering his very short notice replacement, Steve Garcia is 6'0". Peña is an improving fighter each time he steps into the octagon with the hard work he puts in at American Kickboxing Academy. Peña is a solid submission grappler, solid scrambler, a good athlete, is fast, and a solid technical striker (offensively). The areas Peña needs to improve are his striking defense and his takedown defense. Peña retreats with his head straight back & his chin in the air and was still hit by Matt Frevola in this sequence despite having the significant length advantage. Peña's never shown a chin issue or anything, but this is an area I'd like to see him improve, nonetheless. As for the takedown defense, this liability is very evident in all his fights as he has been taken down at least once by every opponent he's faced in the UFC. While I expect this to be a striker's battle primarily, it is a flaw I cannot completely ignore. I think Garcia (trains at Jackson Wink MMA with Jon Jones, Holly Holm, John Dodson, etc.) can make this fight interesting not just due to his length, but also because he throws in combination proficiently, is a varied striker, and pushes a solid pace. As mentioned, this fight is very short notice for Garcia AND this is his UFC debut, so the pick for me is clearly Peña for these reasons

combined with his UFC experience and length advantages, but I can see Garcia making this fight competitive.

For DraftKings: I will fade Luis Peña (\$9,200) as I believe he is too expensive in my opinion relative to his upside in this matchup. Peña is not a huge TKO/KO threat and Garcia (\$7,000) has never been finished via strikes in his 14-fight pro MMA career. Garcia is an underdog worth some small exposure because I think he can make this fight competitive.

Bantamweight Gabriel Silva vs. Kyler Phillips

Both gentlemen are excellent grapplers which is a great skillset to have in general, but going against each other, I see them neutralizing this strength to an extent to where he may see just a striker's battle. Gabriel Silva (a BJJ Black Belt) had his UFC debut against Ray Borg and looked good (he took Borg's back twice) until he gassed midway through the second round. While I do not expect Kyler Phillips (a BJJ world champion) to be pushing the same pace Borg did, but it is still worth noting he slows down as the fight progresses just like Phillips does....Yes, if these two were to grapple, I think they will both tire by the second round. In a striker's battle it's tough to favor one side. I think they're both decent strikers with Phillips being the more threatening striker though I do not expect him to win by TKO/KO, but regardless, I will favor him for that reason. Tough fight to call considering their both similar fighters, but I will side with Phillips.

For DraftKings: I do not have interest in this fight. As noted, both fighters slow down as the fight progresses, so unless a finish occurs early in the fight (which I do not find likely nor do the odds), I do not see the winner putting up a solid score even at their respective, reasonable prices. Phillips (\$7,800) is a live underdog so if I was picking one from here it'd be him.

Middleweight Brendan Allen vs. Tom Breese

I am not a big intangibles guy as I do not find it easy to quantify how a fighter's OUTSIDE the octagon life affects their performance INSIDE the octagon and I bring this up because I have to think that's why the odds are close in this fight. My eyes show me that Tom Breese is a very talented fighter that has great boxing as he is sharp, technical, fast, and powerful. Breese is also a good submission grappler as he holds a black belt in Brazilian Ju Jitsu (has been in BJJ competition since his last MMA fight). Brendan Allen's best skillset is his submission grappling which he showcased on the Dana White's Tuesday Night Contender Series and in his UFC debut. Allen will probably look to get this fight to the mat where he can take Breese down (Breese was taken down three times by Keita Nakamura), but I do not believe Allen is the superior grappler here. Despite Allen winning UFC debut, Kevin Holland took him down easily and took his back which is a red flag in my opinion. I have also seen Allen put in disadvantageous positions on the mat prior to his Dana White's Tuesday Night Contender Series appearance. Breese is not known for his wrestling primarily, but if Kevin Holland can take down Allen, I think Breese can too if Breese would like to try and wrestle. As mentioned, Breese was taken down by Nakamura when he fought at

170lbs but was able to reverse the skilled grappler in Nakamura and threaten with leg lock attempts to get out of disadvantages positions. In the striking exchanges, I expect Breese to have a ton of success because in addition to what I said about his striking, Allen will be much slower than Breese, is not as technical, and does not utilize proper head movement which led to him getting hit multiple times in the few striking exchanges he had with his opponent on the Contender Series.

*Kevin Holland taking Allen's back



If Breese losses this fight, I'd have to think that it was because he had a flat outing, Allen was able to take Breese down and control him for multiple minutes, or Allen just randomly finishes him. I do not find any of those scenarios likely so the pick for me is clearly Breese.

For DraftKings: I prefer to play Tom Breese (\$8,300) or pass on this fight completely. This is a bad matchup for Allen (\$7,900) on paper, so I will not invest any money in him here.

Heavyweight Marcin Tybura vs. Sergey Spivak

Tybura really needs a win to get back on track. Once in a main event that went 5 rounds with Fabricio Werdum, Marcin Tybura has lost in three of his past four octagon appearances. Marcin is a BJJ Black Belt, a decent wrestler, and threatening striker (has a powerful head kick). Marcin does not move his head off the center line which lead to him getting finished via strikes by Shamil Abdurakhimov after getting hit several times prior. In the following fight, Tybura was hurt by Augusto Sakai and finished very early in the fight. While I do not consider Spivak as threatening of a striker as those previous two opponents, the possibility of him hurting Tybura is there. Spivak is mainly a grappler as he showcased against Tai Tuivasa last time out and appeared much more comfortable striking than in previous fights. Spivak likes to land takedowns off caught leg kicks and judo trips. I consider Tybura a decent wrestler, so I do not think Spivak can take Tybura down at least while Tybura is fresh. That said, Tybura's cardio is a liability as evidenced by him slowing down in a lot of his previous fights such as the Derrick Lewis and Shamil Abdurakhimov fights. Tybura may be able to take down Spivak as he's shown willingness to go for takedowns even against threatening submission grapplers in the past (i.e. Stefan Struve). The pick for me here is Tybura, but the durability concerns and striking defense make it not a confident pick.

For DK: I like a little exposure to both fighters here. Both fighters are reasonably priced (\$8,200 for Spivek and \$8,000 for Tybura) and have the capability of finishing in this matchup. This is not a fight I want a lot of exposure to because I can easily see this fight going to a decision in which case the winner will not score sufficiently in my opinion.

Featherweight Jordan Griffin vs. T.J. Brown

I think this fight will be a lot of fun as both fighters really brought it to their opponents in previous matchups. Jordan Griffin will enter the octagon for a third time in the UFC and will be hungry to get a win here after losing to Dan Ige and Chas Skelly. Griffin is a threatening striker (which can certainly help him in this matchup. I'll get to why later.), throws in combinations, is a good athlete, and is a threatening submission grappler. However, Griffin has shown some susceptibilities including being overly aggressive in striking exchanges which led him to getting put in a deep submission attempt early in his Dana White Tuesday Night Contender Series appearance (second image below). I have also seen Griffin put in several bad spots on the mat against both Ige and Skelly which can certainly play a role here against his UFC debutant opponent, T.J. Brown. Brown has very good cardio as he is relentless at pursuing takedowns until he succeeds (I think he can take down Griffin), is a good athlete, a solid wrestler, and is an aggressive & threatening grappler. The susceptibilities I see in Brown's game are in his striking defense (he is willing to brawl and does not move his head off the center line.) and I've seen him reversed on the mat & had his back taken on his Dana White's Tuesday Night Contender Series shown below in the first image. Due to his striking defense being a liability, I've seen Brown rocked multiple times (he has also been finished via strikes twice professionally in MMA). I expect Griffin to have success in the striking exchanges (which he can earn a TKO/KO finish) and T.J. Brown to have success in the wrestling and grappling (which he can earn a submission in top position). I will lean with Griffin here, but I think the odds being close is justified.

For DraftKings: I think this is a sneaky good fight to target. I will have exposure to both fighters being that they are reasonably priced (\$8,500 for Griffin and \$7,700 for Brown), and the winner should score nicely.

*T.J. Brown getting his back taken on Dana White's Tuesday Night Contender Series



*Griffin was put in a deep submission attempt after being overly aggressive while striking in his Dana White's Tuesday Night Contender Series appearance.



*Griffin had his back taken by Skelley



*Griffin was mounted by Ige



Featherweight Aalon Cruz vs. Spike Carlyle

Both gentlemen are making their UFC debuts. This will be a short notice fight for Spike Carlyle who is credentialed in Judo and Brazilian Ju Jitsu, so I am expecting him to try and get this fight to the mat where he'll have the advantage. Spike is relentless at pursuing takedowns (is willing to get tired in pursuit of them) and I expect that trend to continue here as he will be at a striking disadvantage against Aalon who is not only a more technical striker than he is, but will also have a significant length advantage (6.5 inches of reach) and is the more varied striker. Not only should Cruz have the striking

advantage for these reasons, but also because Carlyle keeps his head straight up in the air without keeping a high guard in striking exchanges. Can Carlyle take Cruz down? Yes, I think he can as I've seen Cruz taken down before and Cruz also likes to throw a lot of kicks which Carlyle can catch to get the fight to the mat. I will side with Cruz because I think he is a more polished fighter. Also, Carlyle's cardio as shown to be a liability due to his willingness to aggressively go for takedowns and not utilizing proper takedown technique. The short notice for Carlyle also makes me lean Cruz will get his hand raised.

*Cruz put in a deep submission attempt on the regional scene



For DK: I think this is a solid fight to target. Both fighters are reasonably priced, and I expect the winner to score well. Despite picking Cruz (\$8,900), I think Carlyle (\$7,300) is the better DK play considering his price and path to putting up a big score if he wins (wrestling and grappling).

Welterweight Ismail Naurdiev vs. Sean Brady

A very good fight we have here. I think both prospects are very talented. Let's first start with Ismail Naurdiev who is a good striker as he is varied, technical, controls range well, and has good defense. Ismail is also a 5-time Austrian wrestling champion, has a K-1 pedigree, is a proficient scrambler, solid technical wrestler, and proficient grappler. Ismail lost to Chance Rencountre where he was taken down and controlled on the mat. Rencountre was significantly bigger than Naurdiev and was able to leverage his length by taking Ismail's back, throwing in both hooks, and dragging Naurdiev to the mat (a technique I do not expect Brady to implement as Brady has more traditional/double & single leg takedown technique). I do not think Naurdiev is a bad wrestler nor bad grappler for that loss. I just think Rencountre was able to leverage his length in a way that gave him a unique advantage on the mat when he got top position. I think Naurdiev's ceiling in the UFC is still high despite this slip up. Now, Sean Brady, is a mobile striker, that utilizes the calf kick, can wrestle proficiently, is a defensively sound striker (keeps a high guard and has good movement), is fast, and has power in his hands. Brady looked very good in his UFC debut, but one of the main reasons why was because he had a huge speed advantage over Court McGee which I do not expect to the case here against fellow young fighter and good athlete, Naurdiev. In terms of the wrestling, I can see Brady taking down Naurdiev a couple of times, but I do not see him having as much success controlling Naurdiev on the mat as Rencountre did considering Naurdiev and

Brady are much more similar in size. Since I am not expecting Brady to have a lot of success wrestling here, I expect Naurdiev to win the striking exchanges by keeping range effectively and being the more varied & effective striker.

For DraftKings: I am not that high on this fight. I think Brady (\$7,600) is an okay play considering he can wrestle some and maybe win, but Naurdiev's (\$8,600) striking defense and range management lead me to believe Brady will not land an excessive amount of significant strikes.

AJ's Flash Knockdown Picks:

Lock them in (cash games):

- *Felicia Spencer \$9,400*
- *Grand Dawson \$9,300*

High priced fades:

- ~~*Luis Peña \$9,200*~~
- ~~*Magomed Ankalaev \$9,000*~~

Low-owned GPP higher-priced fighters

- *Jordan Griffin \$8,500*
- *Tom Breese \$8,300*

Low-owned live underdogs (relative to DK pricing):

- *Norma Dumont \$7,100*
- *Spike Carlyle \$7,300*
- *T.J. Brown \$7,700*
- *Ion Cutelaba \$7,200*

Underdogs (relative to DK pricing → below \$8,100) to consider in cash games:

- *Deiveson Figueiredo \$7,400*
- *Ion Cutelaba \$7,200*
- *Steve Garcia *will be \$7,000*