

## The elusive chessboxing knockout, is the board overshadowing the ring?

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There is a very interesting dynamic between the two disciplines of chessboxing, but how to boxing and chess compare to each other? A match typically finished through either checkmate or knockout, but with a maximum of only five rounds of boxing, is a win in the ring really that likely?

In order to find out, Hardcore Pawns has compiled data from professional boxing matches, and we'll analyse just how often you can expect a knockout finish. But before we do any number crunching, let's quickly discuss the rules of chessboxing.

### **The rules of the game**

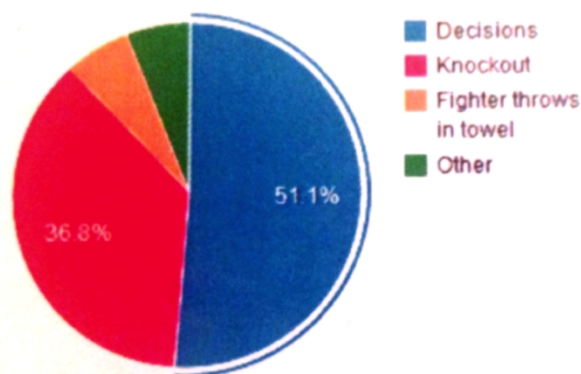
A match starts with a four-minute round of chess. In between every round there is a one-minute pause to put the gloves on and off. If the players are evenly matched on the board, there is likely to be a win through time penalty in the 11<sup>th</sup> round – the moment one of the player's chess clocks will inevitably run out.

Unless the match is decided in the ring. A round of boxing lasts three minutes- just like professional matches. Because of the chess time-out rule, there will never be more than five boxing rounds. This, in theory, will make it much harder for chessboxers to win in the ring than on the board. The alternating rounds structure gives fighters a six-minute 'break' from boxing, and therefore fatigue will be less of an issue compared to normal boxing.

But exactly, how elusive is the knockout? “Not likely at all,” says Lenny Hagland, boxing coach and manager of the Islington Boxing Club. “Obviously, a knockout punch could potentially happen at any stage. But it doesn’t happen as often as people might think,” he says.

### Knockout data

So what does the data say about knockouts? We compiled the results of over 230 WBC boxing matches between 2006 and 2012 from BoxRec and looked at how many were won by knockout (we counted KOs and TKOs – technical knockout – together).

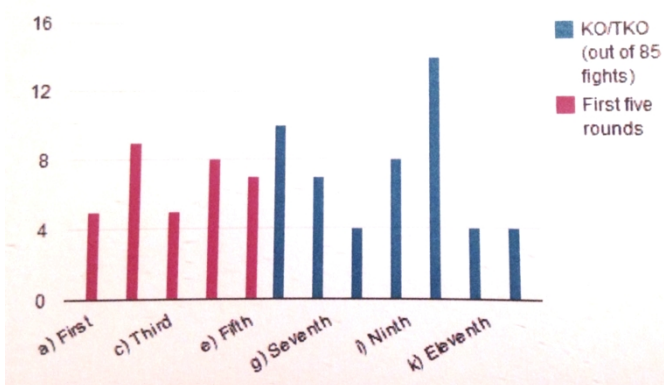


Most often, in half of the matches, they ended by jury decision after the final round (see the first chart). Just under found in ten were decided by a knockout. The remaining 12 per cent was made up by other finishes, mainly by early stoppages because of fouls (both intentional and unintentional) or fighters throwing in the towel.

*\*Decisions (118): unanimous 93, split 12, majority 13.  
Knockout (85):TKO 67, KO 18. Towel thrown in (14). Other(14).  
Total 231 fights.*

Looking more closely at the 85 matches that ended in knockout, it turns out they tend to happen more towards the end of the match (apart from the two final rounds, 11 and 12, which had surprisingly few knockouts). On average, a knockout fight lasts six rounds. Fighters have to watch out in round ten especially, as by far the most knockouts happened then (see the second chart).

Out of 230 matches, only 27 of them (or 12 per cent) ended in a knockout within the first five rounds. And this is of course with consecutive rounds of boxing. In chessboxing,



however, a match comes nowhere near ten boxing rounds.

Lenny, who has been to a couple of chessboxing events, said it is likely to see even fewer knockout finishes still, in chessboxing. “Especially with the long break between the boxing rounds, tiredness doesn’t set in as much,”

He agrees that the better chess player often has the advantage. “If you are ahead on the board, you only have to survive in the boxing.” But developing your boxing skills is not unimportant. He says: “If they are evenly matched chess players, you reply on boxing as well to win.” And in case of a stalemate (chess draw), whoever is the better boxers wins.

## **The theory in practice**

Despite the theory, there have been a number of chessboxing knockouts. In one event in London, promoter Tim Woolgar witnessed second-round finishes (counting chess as round one), in three consecutive matches.

This could be due to a relatively small talent pool of chessboxers. Lenny explains: “Knockouts often happen as a result of a mismatch between the fighters.” This would mean fewer knockouts in the future, as mismatches can be avoided with a growing number of fighters.

We put the question whether boxing is dominated too much by chess to a London chessboxing contender. Chris Levy, who fought on the Brain vs Pain card in March, said: “You can’t really stall on the chess. On the boxing you can keep moving and hold a little bit.” He recounted one of the matches of the event in March. “There was one guy who was the better boxer, one guy who was the better chess player. And the chess player naturally won.”

## **A game changer?**

He thinks that’s just the way chessboxing is, and doesn’t see it as an issue. In turn, the chess game is heavily influenced by the adrenaline from the fighting. Mastering the transition between the two disciplines, therefore, becomes a key to success, which is a unique aspect of the chessboxing game.

Chris agrees that chessboxing is unlikely, but not elusive: “During the last event, there was this amazing fight that went right to the 11<sup>th</sup> round. This guy was losing on the chess and looked like he was completely out of gas on the boxing. Just the fact that he knew he was losing on the board, meant he went completely hell for leather, and managed to knock his opponent down, halfway through the round. So it can happen absolutely.”

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