The octagon returns to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil with a card headlined by the beloved former lightweight champion and global superstar, Charles “Do Bronx” Oliveira (23-11 UFC) across from fellow grappling ace and suitable short notice replacement Mateusz Gamrot (8-3 UFC). The Polish “Gamer” is looking to establish himself as a threat to the lightweight crown while Oliveira is looking to reassert himself atop the division he once ruled over.

h3=. *Luan Lacerda ($8,900) vs. Saimon Oliveira ($7,300)*

Fight Odds: -250 Lacerda vs. +198 Oliveira
Weight Class: 135lb. (Bantamweight)

!(align-ct)https://s3.amazonaws.com/rical-misc/SaimonOliveira.jpg!

Luan Lacerda (0-2 UFC) and Saimon Oliveira (0-3 UFC) are both winless in the organization and looking to give the matchmakers a reason to give them another contract. With a typical four-fight contract, maximal pressure is on Saimon Oliveira here as a loss could mean the end of his UFC journey. Neither man has been impressive yet inside the octagon, but they have been losing against credible opponents. Lacerda hasn’t competed in more than two years, but his two losses in the big show were in early 2023 against Cody Stamann (7-7-1 UFC) in his January debut and Da’Mon Blackshear (5-4-1 UFC) in June. Lacerda has decent technique, but he has never recorded a win by knockout, he has lost by all methods of victory in martial arts, and his reliance on the submission may cost him against a fighter who has never been submitted.

Saimon Oliveira is 0-3 in the UFC, but he does boast an impressive 11-0 professional record to the submission prop. His losses came against stiff competition in the forms of Tony Gravely (4-4 UFC), Daniel Marcos (4-1 UFC), and David Martinez (2-0 UFC; #11 ranked bantamweight). What jumps off the page breaking down this fight is that Oliveira has 24 pro fights compared to just 15 for Lacerda, he has never been submitted (unlike Lacerda), he has 5 wins by KO/TKO (compared to 0 for Lacerda), and he fought earlier this year in March of 2025. Oliveira has a potent front head lock series, he can snatch up guillotines, and his 16-2 record in fights that end inside the distance shows that he can find fight ending positions.

I think both of these guys have a lot to prove in the UFC, but I will trust the recent activity, the depth of professional experience, and the more proven KO upside with Saimon Oliveira.

Prediction: *Saimon Oliveira defeats Luan Lacerda via Stoppage*

h3=. *Julia Polastri ($9,400) vs. Karolina Kowalkiewicz ($6,800)*

Fight Odds: -500 Polastri vs. +360 Kowalkiewicz

Weight Class: W115lb. (Women's Strawweight)

!(align-ct)https://s3.amazonaws.com/rical-misc/JuliaPolastriUFC.jpg!

Julia Polastri (1-2 UFC) has yet to have a breakout moment in the UFC, but I think she may be due for one here against a stalwart of the strawweight division. Polastri will enjoy a significant youth advantage (27 vs. 39), she is the much more violent fighter (7-0 ITD vs. 4-3 ITD), and she has the ability to attack with SUBs or to land damaging strikes in all positions. Polastri is averaging more than 5 significant strikes landed per minute despite dropping two of her first three UFC outings. Now she has a chance to fight an older woman (avg. age of UFC opponents was 28), a woman who has been finished 3 times inside the octagon, and a woman who gave Claudia Gadelha (7-5 UFC) and Jessica Penna (3-6 UFC) their only UFC finishes in a combined 19 fights with the promotion.

Karolina Kowalkiewicz (9-9 UFC) was once a top contender in the division, but now she has become something of a punching bag for up and coming fighters. Kowalkiewicz has lost back to back fights against Denise Gomes (5-2 UFC) and Iasmin Lucindo (5-2 UFC), absorbing 156 combined significant strikes while landing just 88 of her own significant strikes. Kowalkiewicz has been absorbing more than 5 strikes per minute over a huge UFC sample size, and that doesn't seem sustainable now that she is post-prime at 39 years of age. The bottom line for me is that Kowalkiewicz is just 4-7 over her last 11 fights and she hasn't beaten anyone in that stretch of four-straight wins (June '22 to October '23) that impressed me. She defeated Diana Belbita (2-6 UFC), Vanessa Demopoulos (5-5 UFC), Silvana Gomez-Juarez (1-3 UFC), and Felice Herrig (5-5 UFC), three of the lower level girls in the division with Demopoulos being the only impressive win of the bunch. Kowakiewicz has struggled against Brazilians (0-4 UFC), and she is returning to the city in which she was first submitted in the UFC against Gadhela.

Prediction: *Julia Polastri defeats Karolina Kowalkiewicz via Stoppage*

h3=. *Valter Walker ($9,200) vs. Mohammed Usman ($7,000)*

Fight Odds: -325 Walker vs. +250 Usman
Weight Class: 265lb. (Heavyweight)

!(align-ct)https://s3.amazonaws.com/rical-misc/ValterWalkerUFC.jpg!

Valter Walker (3-1 UFC) has been on fire since dropping his UFC debut, and he has racked up three straight wins via first round heel hook. Finding that hold for a fourth consecutive time will be no easy task against "The Motor" Mohammed Usman (4-2 UFC). Usman is an awkward bottom player who has been submitted before in competition, but he is also a decent wrestler with strong physical attributes and a big body for the heavyweight division. Walker will likely

have superiority in the grappling if he can get on top, but this opponent will be harder to horse around than his recent opposition.

The reason I like Walker in this fight is because I think he is continuing to improve, he continues to get in better shape between fights, and he has shown the ability to shoot multiple takedowns, the ability to threaten with submissions, and the ability to rack up control minutes. Against an opponent with some durability concerns like Mo Usman, I think Walker is live to land something meaningful on the feet or to assert his offense with ground and pound on the mat.

The path to victory I see for Usman here would be finding his own takedowns (which I rate as unlikely) or sticking behind his jab and hoping to score big with his own power or to pot shot on the outside for 15 minutes and eke out a close decision as he has frequently done in his wins.

Prediction: *Valter Walker defeats Mohammed Usman via Stoppage*

h3=. *Lucas Rocha ($8,500) vs. Stewart Nicoll ($7,700)*

Fight Odds: -125 Rocha vs. -102 Nicoll
Weight Class: 125lb. (Flyweight)

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Lucas Rocha (0-1 UFC) is dramatically undersized and not very physical, even by flyweight standards. This has caused him to get taken down 7 times in his first two fights between DWCS/UFC. That being said, the upside for Rocha is that he did successfully defend 10/15 attempts from Davi Bittencourt (16-4 Pro) before knocking him stiff in the second round on DWCS. In his UFC debut, he defended just one of three attempts from Clayton Carpenter before conceding 4+ minutes of control time, and eventually, the submission finish. When Rocha is able to keep fights upright, his power shines. He has won by stoppage in 14 of his 17 professional victories, and 10 of those wins were via KO/TKO. He is also substantially more experienced in terms of cage time as a professional despite being ~5 years younger.

Stewart Nicoll (0-1 UFC) will also be looking to bounce back from a set back in his UFC debut, as he was looking fantastic against Jesus Aguilar (4-2 UFC) before being caught in a fight ending front head lock sequence in the very first round. Prior to that, Nicoll was doing very well on the Australian regional scene, even fighting 5 hard 5's for the XFC regional title in 2021. The difficulty with backing Nicoll in this fight is that he seems to rely heavily on his grappling game, and we have seen Rocha show competent stand ups and aggressive counter striking. Moreover, Nicoll is the fighter who has to travel across the world and listen to chants from a distinctly hostile crowd while dealing with the self-doubt that naturally arises from losing your UFC debut.

Prediction: *Lucas Rocha via TKO/DEC (or Nicoll via SUB)*

h3=. *Beatriz Mesquita ($8,200) vs. Irina Alekseeva ($8,000)*

Fight Odds: -530 Mesquita vs. +360 Alekseeva
Weight Class: W135lb. (Women's Bantamweight)

!(align-ct)https://s3.amazonaws.com/rical-misc/BeatrizMesquitaUFC.jpg!

Beatriz Mesquita (UFC Debut) is a welcome addition to a lifeless women's bantamweight division. The promotion matched her up accordingly with one of the least successful women on the roster. Irina Alekseeva (1-2 UFC) memed a knee bar finish against Stephanie Egger (3-4 UFC) in April of 2023 in her UFC debut and she hasn't won a fight since. Her two more recent performances were ugly decision losses in which she was controlled for 8+ minutes against Melissa Mullins (2-2 UFC) in October of 2023 and she absorbed more than 100 significant strikes against Klaudia Sygula (1-1 UFC) in June of 2025.

Alekseeva is really hard to watch because so much of what she does looks sloppy, but she deserves credit for registering a UFC knockdown against Melissa Mullins and for securing a submission win against Stephanie Egger, a former ADCC competitor. She also deserves credit for surviving to see the scorecards in all 3 of her professional losses. I think her 66% takedown defense will falter here and she will get finished on the mat in the first two rounds, but if she is able to survive, make Mesquita work, and land damage, she could position herself to spring a huge upset.

We have seen dominant submission grapplers like Jaquiline Amorim have a ton of success in the UFC, but she lost her UFC debut getting jitters and death gassing from the pressure of a big live crowd. In Rio, the pressure will be on Mesquita. I think she rises to the occasion, but you have to be realistic when you have a talented grappler with limited MMA experience jumping levels.

Prediction: *Beatriz Mesquita defeats Irina Alekseeva via Stoppage (or Alekseeva SDEC)*

h3=. *Vitor Petrino ($9,100) vs. Thomas Petersen ($7,100)*

Fight Odds: -320 Petrino vs. +235 Petersen
Weight Class: 265lb. (Heavyweight)

!(align-ct)https://s3.amazonaws.com/rical-misc/VitorPetrinoUFC.jpg!

Vitor Petrino (5-2 UFC) weighed in at 249lb. For his UFC heavyweight debut, all but confirming that he was cutting too much weight to make the light heavyweight limit. Both losses for Petrino inside the UFC were back-to-back and via stoppage. He was outmaneuvered by the veteran BJJ of Anthony Smith (13-12 UFC) in May of 2024 before returning in December of the same year when he was brutally knocked out by former Glory Kickboxer Dustin Jacoby (9-6-1 UFC). In his first fight up at heavyweight, Petrino looked confident and assertive as he caught a kick, spilled Austen Lane (1-4 UFC), and easily dispatched him on the mat. Petrino continues to hone his submission craft, he has natural power, and he is a superior athlete to his opponent.

Thomas Petersen (2-2 UFC) is a workman like UFC heavyweight with a meat and potatoes approach to mixed martial arts. He has solid enough takedowns, but he doesn't really have the physicality to get takedowns with authority, or to consistently maintain the top position. When Petersen meets minimal resistance, he can dictate a wrestling pace for the full 15 as he did against Don'Tale Mayes (4-7 UFC), but when he ran into Waldo Cortes-Acosta on the regional scene, he wrestled himself into a hole and got finished in the 3rd round. In the UFC, Shamil Gaziev (3-1 UFC) exploded up from a Petersen takedown and proceeded to ice him on the feet in the very first round. The middling Jamal Pogues (2-2 UFC) put a jabbing clinic on Petersen as well. I think Petersen has a limited but functional game that will fall apart against a real athlete.

Prediction: *Vitor Petrino defeats Thomas Petersen via Stoppage*

h3=. *Clayton Carpenter ($8,200) vs. Jafel Filho ($8,000)*

Fight Odds: -128 Carpenter vs. +100 Filho
Weight Class: 125lb. (Flyweight)

!(align-ct)https://s3.amazonaws.com/rical-misc/JafelFilhoUFC.jpg!

Clayton Carpenter (2-1 UFC) made a solid account of himself in a loss against Tagir Ulanbekov (6-1 UFC) in his most recent fight, but he started his UFC career with two consecutive wins by stoppage. In his debut he disposed of Juancamilo Ronderos (0-2 UFC) and he followed that up with a stoppage against Lucas Rocha (0-1 UFC). Ironically, the best win for Carpenter came on DWCS when he defeated Edgar Chairez (2-2 UFC) via Unanimous Decision. Carpenter has a lot of solid pieces to build a game around including more than 2 takedowns on average per 15 minutes to go along with a positive striking differential and solid defense & accuracy percentages. The biggest weakness for Carpenter on paper is his 42% takedown defense rate which is sure to be tested in this matchup.

Jafel Filho (2-2 UFC) is a high level black belt who trained under the watchful eye of respected instructor Marlon Sandro (5th degree BJJ black belt). No one came closer to defeating

undefeated Dagestani sensation Muhammad Mokaev (7-0 UFC) than Jafel Filho, as “Pastor” extended Mokaev so far on a kneebar that he caused permanent damage to the limb. Filho has shown he can close the show on the feet with his power, starching Roybert Echeverria in Rd. 3 to earn his contract on DWCS. He has also shown that he can rally from adversity, surviving an early knockdown against Daniel Barez before finishing him with a nasty submission. Filho is the type of fighter who always has a path to victory by hook or by crook. Despite losing his last fight against Allan Nascimento (a huge, talented black belt), Filho showed me he can compete for takedowns with the best guys in the division, he can threaten with his submission game and get respect from other high level blackbelts, and he can compete close if the fight goes 15 minutes.

I think Jafel Filho will feed off the energy of the Brazilian crowd, land a big shot on the feet, and put away Clayton Carpenter with his ground and pound or with his elite submission game. Fascinating fight!

Prediction: *Jafel Filho defeats Clayton Carpenter via Stoppage*