Fight fans are willing to suffer through lazily matched Apex cards for nights like UFC 322. On paper, this is the most stacked card of the year, featuring a pair of meaningful title fights with champions (current or former) on all sides of both matchups. The welterweight division will be showcased in 3 of the top 5 fights on the bill in what should be a clarifying night for the division. Let's begin with an all action banger in the first prelim of the night.

h3=. *Matheus Camilo ($8,700) vs. Viacheslav Borschev ($7,500)*

Fight Odds: -154 Camilo vs. +126 Borschev
Weight Class: 125lb. (Flyweight)

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

Matheus Camilo (0-1 UFC) dropped the ball in his UFC debut, submitting for the third time in as many professional losses. Now he takes on former professional kickboxer Viacheslav Borschev (3-5-1 UFC) in a fight where he should have a decided wrestling and grappling advantage (Slava is 0-2 career to the SUB vs. 2-3 for Camilo). Camilo is also 9 years younger and at virtual size parity with Slava.

Neither of these fighters are trustworthy because Camilo has shown shaky cardio and a willingness to concede on the mat, while Borschev has shown poor recent form (2-5-1 in his last 8 fights) and major durability concerns. Slava has been fighting the higher quality competition, but he has taken a ton of damage, he sports a 42% takedown defense rate, and his UFC wins came against bottom of the barrel competition (combined record of 4-10 UFC). If Camilo can touch the chin of Slava, test his grappling pedigree, or manage his gas tank better than last fight, he will have every opportunity to defeat Borschev. If he gets cute on the feet, lets Slava off the hook, or mismanages his gas tank, he risks dropping back to back starts in the promotion.

In a fight between unreliable commodities, give me the 25 year old with more paths to victory.

Prediction: *Mathues Camilo defeats Slava Borschev via SUB/DEC (or Slava via Rd.2/3)*

h3=. *Baisangur Susurkaev ($9,800) vs. Eric McConico ($6,400)*

Fight Odds: -1050 Susurkaev vs. +630 McConico
Weight Class: 185lb. (Middleweight)

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

Baisangur Susurkaev (1-0 UFC) is a future star in the making. He is composed in all positions, including under fire. Susurkaev was hurt by CFFC Champion Eric Nolan in his UFC debut, but he never faltered, he continued to apply pressure, and he found the submission finish. Susurkaev doesn't accept grappling from his opponents, he commits to his offense on the feet, and he is constantly making improvements at 24 years of age.

Eric McConico (1-1 UFC) is lucky to have a UFC win under his belt, winning a close and somewhat controversial decision against Cody Brundage in his last fight. His UFC debut was a second round stoppage loss against Nursulton Ruziboev, who seemed to have McConico nervous to engage from the outset. McConico has the tools to win close decisions, but I don't rate him as a particularly dangerous fighter.

I think this should be a highlight reel opportunity for a burgeoning star in Susurkaev. The "Hunter" finds his second UFC finish in as many UFC appearances this weekend.

Prediction: *Baisangur Susurkaev defeats Eric McConico via Stoppage Rd. 1/2*

h3=. *Fatima Kline ($9,500) vs. Angela Hill ($6,700)*

Fight Odds: -500 Kline vs. +360 Hill
Weight Class: W115lb. (Women's Strawweight)

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

Fatima Kline (2-0 UFC) dropped her UFC debut on short notice, up a weight class against a battle tested, ranked flyweight in Jasmine Jasudavicious. Since she dropped down to her natural home of strawweight, she has looked sensational, dispatching both Victoria Dudakova and Melissa Martinez inside the distance. Now she has an opponent in Angela Hill (13-15 UFC) who is post prime, who has arguably lost 3 fights in a row, and who is 15 years her senior (25 vs. 40). Fatima Kline is a New York local fighting at the world's most famous arena, and I think she has her official stargazing performance in the Garden in front of her local faithful.

Prediction: *Fatima Kline defeats Angela Hill via Stoppage Rd. 2/3*

h3=. *Pat Sabatini ($8,300) vs. Chepe Mariscal ($7,900)*

Fight Odds: -132 Sabatini vs. +108 Mariscal
Weight Class: 145lb. (Featherweight)

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

Pat Sabatini (7-2 UFC) has an elite grappling game, evidenced by his 13-0 career record to the submission prop (including 3-0 in the UFC). Since he started working with a sport psychologist, his confidence has been on point and he has rattled off back to back victories against quality opponents Jonathan Pearce (5-4 UFC) via submission and Joanderson Brito (5-3 UFC) via decision. Sabatini's biggest (and really only) major liability throughout his career has been his fragility. Sabatini's chin has been tested in wins like the Jamall Emmers (5-4 UFC) fight, as well as both of his UFC losses against Diego Lopes (6-2 UFC) and Damon Jackson (6-6-1 UFC; 1NC).

Chepe Mariscal (5-0 UFC) has a split decision win over Pat Sabatini from the regional scene in 2018, in a fight that could have gone either way. Now both men's paths will cross again, and the winner seems poised for a step up into ranked competition. Mariscal is undefeated in the UFC, relying on his pace, his aggression, his volume, and his well rounded attack to win fights on the scorecards.cards. His only stoppage in the promotion was a TKO due to injury against Jack Jenkins. Mariscal has what he calls "hood judo", and he uses it to keep fights upright and reverse positions. Mariscal is a scrambly body, he is typically very difficult to hold down, and he has never been submitted in 24 professional fights.

This fight feels like a very binary matchup that should be closely lined. Sabatini has more big favorite upside because his style of fighting is very focused on achieving and maintaining control positions, while Mariscal embraces chaos, violence, and pressure. If Mariscal is able to buzz Sabatini or defend takedowns, this will be a winnable fight for him. Mariscal has gotten a more athletic body composition since the last time these two fought. That being said, the biggest difference between these two fighters since the last time they fought is that Sabatini finally seems to understand how he wins fights in the UFC, while Mariscal is relying on pace and thin margins.

Prediction: *Pat Sabatini defeats Chepe Marsical via SUB/DEC*

h3=. *Kyle Daukaus ($9,300) vs. Gerald Meerschaert ($6,900)*

Fight Odds: -430 Daukaus vs. +320 Meerschaert
Weight Class: 185lb. (Middleweight)

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

Kyle Daukaus (3-4 UFC) looked rejuvenated against Michel Pereira (9-5 UFC) with a KO1 win in his return to the UFC, and now he gets another opportunity to add a potential highlight to his reel. His opponent Gerald "GM3" Meerschaert (12-12 UFC) has been finished in 14 of his 20

professional losses, including 7 of his 12 UFC losses (3 of his last 5 losses). Daukaus is a BJJ black belt with an 11-0 record to the submission prop, so Meerschaert's A-Game will be difficult to pull off. Daukaus is also the more accurate, powerful, and voluminous striker, he is hard to kill (only 2 career losses ITD), and he is highly motivated.

After being cut from the roster once, Daukaus realized how important it is for him to continue winning and making statements with his performances. I expect Daukaus to get his second finish in as many fights back with the promotion, and perhaps usher the great Gerald Meerschaert (37 going on 38 in December) into retirement after a 57-fight professional career that dates back to January of 2007.

Prediction: *Kyle Daukaus defeats Gerald Meerschaert via Stoppage Rd. 1/2*

h3=. *Erin Blanchfield ($9,000) vs. Tracy Cortez ($7,200)*

Fight Odds: -265 Blanchfield vs. +200 Cortez
Weight Class: W125lb. (Women's Flyweight)

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

Erin Blanchfield (7-1 UFC) is 2-0 fighting on UFC Pay-Per-Views, and she gets her third opportunity in front of her local North East fans. Blanchfield already lit up the Garden once when she submitted fan favorite Molly "Meatball" McCann (7-7 UFC) at UFC 281. "Coldblooded" gets a chance to avenge one of her only two career losses, in this case, a split decision in 2019 when she was just 19 years old.

Tracy Cortez (6-1 UFC) bounced back from her first UFC loss against Rose Namajunas (12-6 UFC) by earning a workman like decision against Vivianne Araujo (7-6 UFC). Now she has another tough out against Erin Blanchfield, a former foe who is older, wiser, and more dangerous than she was the last time they fought. Cortez has only managed two finish wins in her 14-fight professional career, and she is the only fighter of the pair who has ever been finished.

Erin Blanchfield seems like the more committed athlete, she has proven to be the more dangerous fighter (6 wins ITD vs. 2), and she has made the most obvious improvements since the last time these fighters met.

Prediction: *Erin Blanchfield wins via Rd 2/3/UDEC*

h3=. *Gregory Rodrigues ($8,600) vs. Roman Kopylov ($7,600)*

Fight Odds: -188 Rodrigues vs. +146 Kopylov
Weight Class: 185lb. (Middleweight)

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

Gregory Rodrigues (8-3 UFC), otherwise known as “Robocop,” is one of the most intimidating figures in the middleweight division. Rodrigues entered the UFC billed as a former BJJ world champion, but he has established himself as a knockout artist within the division. He also has a number of quality wins within the promotion including knockouts against Jack Hermansson (11-7 UFC), Brad Tavares (16-11 UFC), Jun Yong Park (9-4 UFC), and Chidi Njokuani (5-4 UFC). His decision win over Christian Leroy Duncan (6-2 UFC) has also aged particularly well as he was able to manage pace for 15 minutes and find dominant grappling positions. The biggest flaw for Rodrigues is his durability which seems to come and go with the wind. Rodrigues is insanely tough, willing to wade through damage to achieve victory, but he can also be cut, he can be buzzed, and he can be finished. Four of Robocop’s six professional losses have been knockouts, so he will have to mind his P’s and Q’s against a seasoned striker.

Roman Kopylov (6-4 UFC) is a powerful kicker, he puts together aesthetic combinations, and he has improved his wrestling and grappling over the course of his UFC tenure. The problem is, Kopylov has suspect cardio, he struggles to deal with pressure (see the Costa, “Fluffy” fights), and he can be controlled on the mat. Kopylov has also earned quality UFC victories against the likes of Chris Curtis (6-4 UFC), Cesar Almeida (3-1 UFC), and Punahele Soriano (6-4 UFC). The issue is, he needed to rely on wrestling to gut out an ugly split decision against an inexperienced Cesar Almeida, and he beat Soriano before he dropped to welterweight (3-0 WW).

Gregory Rodrigues has been fighting in main events, he is 3-1 competing on UFC pay-per-view events, and he has a more well rounded approach to fighting. Both of these men have the firepower to close the show, but Kopylov has shown more willingness to capitulate when the going gets tough. Give me Robocop to find his first UFC win by SUB (or a decision win based on top control).

Prediction: *Gregory Rodrigues defeats Roman Kopylov via Rd. 2/3/DEC*

h3=. *Bo Nickal ($9,100) vs. Rodolfo Vieira ($7,100)*

Fight Odds: -245 Nickal vs. +186 Vieira
Weight Class: 185lb. (Middleweight)

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

Bo Nickal (4-1 UFC) had his world rocked by Reinier de Ridder (4-1 UFC) in his last fight, dropping round one before getting finished with a brutal series of knees to the body in the second round. Nickal has shown an ability to find knockouts and submissions when he is able to be the hammer, but he did not react well to being a nail. I had some skepticism about Nickal's growth and development when he dragged a competitive striking decision out of the since retired Paul "Bearjew" Craig (9-10-1 UFC), but his reaction after the fact, calling the performance dominant, reeked of delusion. Nickal ate a fat slice of humble pie in his last fight. For some fighters, they are unable to recover the same aura of invincibility that propelled them to success after suffering their first defeat. For others, they build themselves back into a better version of themselves. For Nickal, we get our first indication on Saturday night.

Rodolfo Vieira (6-3 UFC) has struggled to win UFC fights when he can not achieve takedowns, but he has still put 6 wins on the board and 5 wins by submission. His last fight against Tresean Gore (2-4 UFC) showed that he can double up an opponent at distance, he can ply his craft over 15 minutes, and he can win even when the takedowns don't materialize. Vieira has significantly more cage time than Nickal as a professional and in the UFC. He also has an excellent jiu jitsu pedigree, a 100% takedown defense rate, and he has never been stopped with strikes. The biggest vulnerability for Vieira is his ability to match a high pace rate (he melted badly against Fluffy) and his propensity for wearing damage.

Bo Nickal was given a very soft landing in the UFC, but now he is being matchmade in a more sink or swim fashion. It is possible that the 29 year old wrestling phenom needed one loss as a wakeup call, but he seemed unprepared in the clinch, unprepared in the bottom position, and uncomfortable under pressure. Vieira has been paying dues against higher level opponents, he has accrued a serious amount of cage time, and he has developed a functional if meat and potatoes striking game. If Nickal elects to make it a low volume kickboxing match like he did with Paul Craig, don't be surprised if he ends up losing on thin margins. Nickal outlanded Craig by just 7 distance strikes, and Craig refuses to throw any punches. Unless Nickal can find the button on Rodolfo Vieira, I think he has another very tough fight on his hands.

Prediction: *Rodolfo Vieira defeats Bo Nickal via SUB/DEC (or Nickal via KO)*