Written by Ronan Keenan
Friday, 07 September 2007 19:00

LONDON, England – The Queen may not have been in attendance, but she would have been treated to a royal clinic in grappling as Quinton 'Rampage' Jackson won a unanimous decision over Dan Henderson to become the unified 205-pound champion at the O2 Arena on Saturday evening.

The bout was fought at close quarters with Henderson negating the UFC titlist's attacks throughout the five rounds. Jackson showed little of the devastating punching power he used to dethrone Chuck Liddell last May, but managed to impose his will on Henderson in a tactical battle.

Whenever Jackson did mount a two-fisted assault, the wily Henderson used his extensive wrestling experience to tie up the naturally larger man, but was unable to have much offensive success of his own.

With the victory, Jackson, 28-6, becomes the first fighter to hold both the UFC and Pride FC championships and answered critics who claimed he was a one-dimensional puncher.

"I got ju-jitsu skills and I showed that tonight," said the champion after the bout.

Despite been taken down on numerous occasions, Jackson demonstrated immense strength in rising back his feet and limiting Henderson's expected edge in submission skills. And when the two fighters did trade strikes, it was clear that Jackson was the heavier hitter.

The 29-year-old Jackson can now look forward to a mega pay-per-view showdown with the winner of December's proposed Liddell-Wanderlei Silva showdown or the highly rated Mauricio 'Shogun' Rua.

"Tonight was tough," said Jackson. "My face hurts now. We went blow for blow in there, and I knew that I had to be on top of my game to beat Dan."

From the start Henderson, a two-time Olympic Greco-Roman wrestler, looked to keep the fight at close range, and it wasn't long before he managed to take Jackson onto the ground. He attained side control, but Jackson managed to power his way back to a standing position. The two fighters exchanged punches as the round drew to a close, but neither managed to land cleanly.

However, Jackson did connect with a right hand in the second, which Henderson absorbed and succeeded in wrestling the Memphis native to the canvas. Once more, Jackson muscled his way back to his feet and forced Henderson to the ground. But the two-weight Pride titlist was able to cling on firmly and stifle Jackson's offence.

'Rampage' went on the attack at the start of the third, but Henderson, 22-6, stood his ground

and managed to evade Jackson's hooks. At the end of the exchange Jackson scored a takedown, but was unable to prize open Henderson's water-tight ground defence.

The action was intriguing, while not exciting, and the 16,000 capacity crowd began to get impatient with the lack of striking in the fourth round, but Jackson soon answered their demands with a grazing left hook that felled Henderson.

Still, the 37-year-old's punch resistance was admirable and he succeeded in subduing Jackson's follow-up assault and ceasing any action, forcing referee John McCarthy to bring both fighters to their feet. A sharp right hand connected with Henderson's jaw, forcing him onto the back foot just before the round's end.

The beginning of the final round saw Jackson up the pace, launching a barrage of punches that were duly answered by Henderson. Yet as the round wore on Jackson began to land with more regularity, but Henderson did manage to retaliate with a flush right hand that led to another takedown success.

Nonetheless, Jackson again displayed excellent ground defence and regained his feet before striking Henderson with a series of knees to the body. The attack seemed to have a visible effect on Henderson, who stumbled to the canvas seconds before the final bell.

The judges' scores of 48-47 and 49-46 (twice) gave Jackson a hard-earned victory and left Henderson contemplating his mistakes.

"I think I just spent a bit too much time on my back," said the Pride fighter. "I probably should have been a more aggressive. Still, I felt good at 205 pounds and will fight at the weight again."

"I'm not sure who or where I'll be fighting," he added, alluding to the precarious status of the Pride organization.

Conversely, Jackson knows what he wants to do next.

"I want to fight the people that beat up on me in the past," he stated at the post-fight press conference in a possible reference to Wanderlei Silva, who holds two victories over 'Rampage'.

- In the chief support bout, England's Michael Bisping was awarded a debatable split decision win over Matt Hamill in an action-packed contest. (ED NOTE: Hamill was robbed! Hey, it happens in MMA too, huh? Crappy judges are everywhere!)

Hamill began the bout in aggressive fashion, working behind a stiff jab that forced Bisping onto the back foot. The American set a fast pace, landing frequently with wild jab-right hand combinations. A sharp right rocked Bisping at the end of the round and a follow-up attack saw him fall to the ground just before the bell.

The second round began with Hamill again on the offensive and he used his noted wrestling skills to take down Bisping on two occasions, but the Englishman showed good defensive skills

to quickly get to his feet. Bisping staged a two-fisted attack as the round drew to a close, but he was unable to get through Hamill's tight defence.

Hamill enjoyed further takedown success in the final round, forcing Bisping to the floor and keeping him on his back. Still, Hamill was unable to take advantage of his position and Bisping, 15-0, eventually got to his feet and launched a furious attack as the partisan crowd roared their approval.

Yet Hamill, 5-1, seemed unfazed by the onslaught and enjoyed more success with his jab and took Bisping to the ground as the fight drew to a close.

Before the contest, Bisping labelled Hamill as "the most limited fighter in the UFC", but on this showing it was the hometown favourite that seemed lacking.

- Mirko Cro Cop's disappointing UFC form continued as he lost a lacklustre unanimous decision to Cheick Kongo. The former Pride heavyweight star was highly touted on his arrival to the UFC, but last May he was sensationally knocked out by Gabriel Gonzaga in a stunning upset.

Cro Cop, 22-6-2, won the first round against Kongo by controlling the taller fighter on the ground in a relatively quiet opening five minutes. Kongo, 21-3-1, wrestled the Croatian to the floor in the second frame and was on top for the majority of round, but was unable to break through Cro Cop's guard.

A low knee blow from Kongo early in the third seemed to hurt Cro Cop, who spent the remainder of the round on the back foot as the Frenchman enjoyed success with his rangy strikes.

Just after the final bell sounded, Cro Crop slumped to his stool and seemed to be citing that he was still in pain from the earlier low blow. Nonetheless, it was a below par performance from Cro Cop, who showed no evidence of the offensive skills that made him a star in Japan.

- Marcus Davis scored his tenth consecutive victory by submitting England's Paul Taylor in the first round. Taylor, 8-2-1, floored Davis with a right kick, but 'The Irish Hand Grenade' managed to shake off the follow-up assault and ultimately gained side control on the Englishman. A succession of right hands on the ground stunned Taylor and allowed Davis, 18-4, to lock in an armbar to gain the win. (ED. NOTE: This was the fight of the night, fast, furious and I demand a rematch, please, Dana.)

- Houston Alexander, 21-3-1, turned in another impressive display in knocking out Alessio Sakara in 61 seconds. Alexander, who burst onto the light heavyweight scene with a stunning victory over Keith Jardine last May, showed great strength in overpowering Sakara before unleashing a big knee that landed squarely on his opponent's jaw.

Sakara, 15-6, fell heavily to the canvas and a follow-up assault from Alexander forced referee Yves Lavigne to call a halt to the action.

- Gleison Tibau, 28-3, employed a strong wrestling game to control the resilient Terry Etim, 10-1, en route to a unanimous decision win in the 155-pound division.

- In a bruising light heavyweight bout Brazilian Thiago Silva, 11-0, retained his unbeaten record after catching Tomasz Drwal, 14-2, with a sharp right hand and following up with a succession of accurate punches and knees to force the referee's intervention.

- In lightweight action Dennis Siver, 11-4, landed a crushing left hook to score a second round stoppage of Japan's Naoyuki Kotani, 17-7-5.

- Welterweight Jess Liaudin moved his record to 12-8 with an impressive first round stoppage of Anthony Torres, 5-2.