If we didn't like kickboxing, LiverKick wouldn't exist, but in liking kickboxing one must also realize the many things that have held back or are holding back the sport. These problems have existed since the beginning and have really never been fixed, so as it is, kickboxing has floated around, trying to figure out its identity and where it actually stands in the grand scheme of things in the world of sports. Two main problems are that kickboxing hasn't been promoted and organized like a legitimate sport and that kickboxing has always lacked centralization at the top level. The UFC promoted MMA as a sport to a much higher degree than anyone in kickboxing has ever done and made attempts to actually get MMA recognized as a legitimate sport. Their goal was always to be the universally recognized number one organization with all the top fighters under one roof, and their model has stood the test of time and paid dividends for MMA as a whole in its growth as a sport. If kickboxing wants to go anywhere as a legitimate sport, it needs the UFC model.

Kickboxing, contrary to some belief, has never had a UFC-type organization. K-1 was never the UFC of kickboxing. One or two weight classes for the majority of its existence, frequent mismatches, freakshows, favoritism and more focus on the spectacle than the actual sport itself. K-1 promoted kickboxing more like pro wrestling as opposed to a legitimate sport. This isn't to say that the UFC doesn't do some of these things as well, but they're all done to a much lower degree than the old K-1. The UFC pushed to get MMA recognized as a sport and in doing so pushed their brand at the forefront at the same time, while MMA continued and continues to grow internationally.

Dilution of talent across the board has also done no favors for the sport. What was the top organization in the sport, K-1, only had one/two weight classes for the majority of its existence. In a sport where it's already barely viable for making a living, the at the time top organization only had two weight classes. Not only is that downright discouraging for anyone at any other weight classes, it further dilutes talent between several places. There's a reason kickboxing has a shallow talent pool compared to MMA, boxing and Muay Thai, and it stems from how the sport has been handled. Compare the talent pool in MMA now to when there wasn't a legitimate, universally recognized number one organization that actually advanced the sport. Obviously MMA continues to advance in its intracacies itself but the sport's growth is due in large part to there being a a clear top organization with all the top fighters that has expanded and advanced the sport in a proper manner. A proper set of weight divisions in the top organization creates more opportunities for more fighters and encourages growth of the sport. Due to the old K-1's model, some of the sport's best fighters simply were left in the dust and got no recognition while guys who had no business being in a kickboxing match like Akebono were given a spotlight. Did it draw big TV ratings and crowds in Japan? Sure, but that's more spectacle than sport. Some people are totally fine with that. I'm not and I believe it's held back kickboxing's growth as a sport.

The most viable way to advance kickboxing is through centralization of the top talent, with a universally recognized top organization with universally recognized rules that tries to promote and expand as a legitimate sport. The UFC model is the proven way to go. There's nothing wrong with there being other organizations. MMA still has a bunch of them. As long as multiple promotions aren't diluting the talent and preventing the best from fighting the best in one place, there's no problem. For the past few years in kickboxing, the problem has been that the talent has been diluted, split up through multiple promotions. The best weren't fighting the best.

Hockey, basketball and baseball are all examples of sports that have the best playing against each other on a regular basis, in the NHL, NBA and MLB. They're all much different in structure than any combat sports obviously, but why should kickboxing be any different? Why should all the talent be diluted across multiple platforms that for most people, let alone casual fans or people trying to get into the sport, are a headache to follow? We experienced this with the UFC and PRIDE, and to a lesser degree, Strikeforce. We were prevented for a long time from seeing some of the biggest fights, and the same goes for boxing with the rift between Top Rank and Golden Boy.

Some will argue that competition breeds a better product on both sides, but in the case of kickboxing I don't think it matters. Kickboxing is already confusing enough to follow for people who aren't hardcore fans. Hell, it's hard enough to follow for a lot of hardcore fans as well. Not only that, but then we get back to the root of the problem where the talent is diluted and we're prevented from seeing the fights we want to see. Centralization of the sport's top talent under

one banner in a legitimate sporting format just makes everything easier and more practical, and just logically makes more sense

Not everything about the UFC is perfect. To use a quote from a Twitter conversation I had with Derek Suboticki, "I didn't pick Dana; he was just leading the charge that I wanted led when I got here." GLORY is the number one organization right now, and it's not really close. Some people don't like them and some continue to cling on to the K-1 nostalgia, which in my opinion really wasn't as great as it's made out to be in the first place, as I've previously talked about in this post. GLORY have money and they have plans - plans that are more along the lines of what in my opinion need to happen to move kickboxing forward as a legitimate sport. They face similar challenges to what the UFC faced initially, in that they're going to have to lose money at first to try and make money in the long term. You may not like them, or you may not agree with some of the things they do, but no one else is in the position that they are in and no one else really has the same plan. It's not everyday that someone comes around with money and plans for kickboxing. They are what we have to work with right now and instead of people picking sides, which is a common theme, the bigger picture has to be looked at in terms of moving the sport forward.

Right now we're in a transition period in kickboxing. I'm not saying that any of this will actually happen, but at this time, the potential is there for kickboxing to move towards a new chapter in its history, to start doing things in what I think is the right way to become a more legitimate sport. The past was good for what it was, but kickboxing has always had the potential to be so much more and it's time to move on and move towards making kickboxing a more legitimate sport, which in turn would hopefully reflect in its growth.