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Column: UFC faces major decision after Max Holloway’s TKO of Conor McGregor

Conor McGregor



Photo by: Mark J. Rebilas-Imagn Images

The atmosphere at T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas was electric for UFC 329, charged with the anticipation of Conor McGregor's return after a five-year absence.

But the air was sucked out of the building just 69 seconds into the main event, transforming a celebratory comeback into a haunting scene of deja vu as McGregor collapsed with a catastrophic right leg injury.

For McGregor, Saturday night provided a definitive answer to a five-year question. His physical performance was impossible to gauge beyond his movement, which appeared compromised almost immediately. His rhythm seemed off from the opening bell, characterized by multiple uncharacteristic slips on the canvas.

Before his conditioning could truly be tested in the welterweight division, the unfortunate injury occurred while throwing a kick, rendering questions about ring rust or his cardio at 170 pounds moot for now.

"I had no injury/injuries going into the fight," McGregor wrote on his X account after the fight. "I was throwing kicks, planted and jumping, all throughout camp as well as backstage before the fight. This came out of nowhere. I am beyond dark here. I can only describe it as hell."

Looking ahead, this result positions the former two-division champion — who turns 38 on Tuesday — at a harrowing career crossroads. Having sustained a severe injury mirroring his UFC 264 exit against Dustin Poirier in July 2021, the question of whether he can — or should — continue to compete at this level is the only one that matters.

Any potential matchmaking talks are indefinitely sidelined as McGregor faces yet another grueling rehabilitation process, although Max Holloway — who won by TKO at 1:09 of the first round when his opponent was forced to retire — appears OK with waiting for him.

On the other side of the Octagon, Holloway's brief performance demonstrated his poise as he navigated the jump

to 170 pounds. He looked comfortable in the center of the cage, using distance management to frustrate

McGregor before the fight ended prematurely. Holloway executed his game plan by staying disciplined, even if he didn't get the opportunity to fully test his power at the new weight class.

For Holloway, whose career has long been a source of immense pride for his home state of Hawaii, this outcome cements his status as a resilient, adaptable champion, though it leaves his next move ambiguous.

With massive regional interest across the islands, his ability to secure a win on the sport's biggest stage — regardless of how it ended — keeps him in the spotlight. The 34-year-old must now decide if his future remains at 170 pounds or if a return to the lightweight title picture is imminent.

Ultimately, UFC 329 will be remembered for the duality of its results: the heartbreaking uncertainty surrounding McGregor and the continued excellence of Holloway.

As the promotion heads into the summer's remainder, the event serves as a stark reminder of the sport's volatility. The landscape of the welterweight division remains in flux, leaving fans and the organization alike to grapple with the reality that the sport's biggest nights can turn on a single step.

–Zain Bando, Field Level Media

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