

Triller Fight Club



- 1 Sports, entertainment, and unfettered greed are a match made in heaven. This past weekend, millions of Americans gawked from home as YouTuber Jake Paul knocked out former mixed martial arts (MMA) world champion Ben Askren in just under two minutes. The match marked the buzzworthy conclusion of the inaugural weekend of Triller Fight Club, a series of boxing matches hosted by short-form video sharing app Triller.
- 2 The odd, filled-with-money-but-still-hollow feeling of Triller Fight Club is perhaps the best wrap-up of our current cultural moment: Lured in part by a guaranteed payday, celebrities earn pointless credits for their new boxing career – which has nothing to do with the reason they’re famous – by fighting arguable athletic mismatches.
- 3 Fans of Paul may know Ben Askren as a former MMA fighter and Olympic wrestler, so the fact that Paul stepped into the ring in the first place is interesting in itself. What audiences might not know is that the 36-year-old Askren was known for being a poor boxer, and that he retired from MMA in 2019 in part due to a hip injury. The spectacle of a 24-year-old YouTuber making light work of an older opponent lays bare the mechanics of contemporary fame: We watch as already-famous personalities forge boxing careers out of thin air, on the backs of athletes who have been chewed up and spat out by the athletic industrial complex.
- 4 The calculus for throwing anyone with millions of followers into the ring, ultimately, is not that different from buying followers on Instagram until you become a bona fide influencer. Instead of building up boxers over time, you can convince someone with lots of followers to enter the sport. And not even Triller’s own executives are pretending that it’s anything more than that. As Bert Marcus, Triller’s show director, said in an interview with *Rolling Stone*: “This isn’t sports, it’s entertainment that has sports.”

- 5 On the surface, it's understandable why certain celebrities and athletes might want to 9: These events offer a check and some publicity. But watching this weekend's spectacle of a former MMA athlete joining a novelty event like Triller Fight Club begs the question: What led Askren to Triller in the first place? "MMA pay is criminally low," Trent Reinsmith, a journalist who covers mixed martial arts, told *VICE*. Askren earned more with the Triller appearance than all of his UFC appearances combined.

adapted from *vice.com*, 2021