

ESPN

Degree of Difficulty Study

Boxing's knockout punch

We sized them up. We measured them, top to bottom. We've done our own Tale of the Tape, and we've come to a surprising conclusion. Pound for pound, the toughest sport in the world is . . .

Boxing.

The Sweet Science.

That's the sport that demands the most from the athletes who compete in it. It's harder than football, harder than baseball, harder than basketball, harder than hockey or soccer or cycling or skiing or fishing or billiards or any other of the 60 sports we rated.

In Page 2's Ultimate Degree of Difficulty Grid, boxing scores higher than them all.

But don't take our word for it. Take the word of our **panel of experts**, a group made up of sports scientists from the United States Olympic Committee, of academicians who study the science of muscles and movement, of a star two-sport athlete, and of journalists who spend their professional lives watching athletes succeed and fail.

They're the ones who told us that boxing is the most demanding sport -- and that fishing is the *least* demanding sport.

We identified 10 categories, or skills, that go into athleticism, and then asked our eight panelists to assign a number from 1 to 10 to the demands each sport makes of each of those 10 skills. By totalling and averaging their responses, we arrived at a degree-of-difficulty number for each sport on a 1 to 100 scale. That number places the difficulty of performing each sport in context with the other sports we rated.

On the grid below, click on each sortable category to find out how our 60 sports rank in each skill. A glossary key is included at the bottom of the grid that explains each category.

So put on the gloves, get in the ring and let the roundhouse hooks begin.

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Caple: Degree of Difficulty Project

Wiley: Boxing's got it bad

Neel/Schoenfield: Hoops debate

SPORTSNATION: DO YOU AGREE?

- **Vote: [What's the toughest sport of all?](#)**
- **Debate sports' degree of difficulty with Page 2's writers and experts in [The Show](#)**
- **Think boxing's not tough? Go toe-to-toe with former [heavyweight champ Hasim Rahman](#) in the SportsNation chat room.**

Degree of Difficulty: Sport Rankings

SPORT	END	STR	PWR	SPD	AGI	FLX	NER	DUR	HAN	ANA	TOTAL	RANK
Boxing	8.63	8.13	8.63	6.38	6.25	4.38	8.88	8.50	7.00	5.63	72.375	1
Ice Hockey	7.25	7.13	7.88	7.75	7.63	4.88	6.00	8.25	7.50	7.50	71.750	2
Football	5.38	8.63	8.13	7.13	6.38	4.38	7.25	8.50	5.50	7.13	68.375	3
Basketball	7.38	6.25	6.50	7.25	8.13	5.63	4.13	7.75	7.50	7.38	67.875	4
Wrestling	6.63	8.38	7.13	5.13	6.38	7.50	5.00	6.75	4.25	6.38	63.500	5
Martial Arts	5.00	5.88	7.75	6.38	6.00	7.00	6.63	5.88	6.00	6.88	63.375	6
Tennis	7.25	5.13	7.13	6.75	7.75	5.63	3.00	5.00	8.38	6.75	62.750	7
Gymnastics	5.38	6.13	6.63	5.00	6.38	10.00	7.50	6.88	4.50	4.13	62.500	8
Baseball/Softball	4.63	5.75	7.63	6.50	6.75	4.75	5.13	5.63	9.25	6.25	62.250	9
Soccer	7.75	4.50	5.13	7.25	8.25	4.75	3.63	6.25	6.50	7.50	61.500	10
Skilling: Alpine	5.13	5.25	6.00	7.38	6.13	5.63	8.38	6.00	5.13	5.63	60.625	11
Water Polo	7.88	6.63	6.88	5.38	6.38	5.00	4.25	6.38	6.25	5.63	60.625	11
Rugby	6.75	7.00	6.38	5.88	6.00	4.13	6.50	7.88	4.38	5.63	60.500	13
Lacrosse	6.63	5.13	5.75	7.00	6.63	4.75	4.38	6.13	7.13	6.88	60.375	14
Rodeo: Steer Wrestling	4.00	7.00	7.88	3.88	4.88	5.00	7.88	6.88	5.13	4.00	56.500	15

SPORT	END	STR	PWR	SPD	AGI	FLX	NER	DUR	HAN	ANA	TOTAL	RANK
Track and Field: Pole Vault	3.38	6.88	7.25	6.13	5.38	7.00	6.63	4.25	5.25	3.75	55.875	16
Field Hockey	6.75	4.50	5.38	6.00	5.75	4.63	3.75	5.00	6.63	6.50	54.875	17
Speed Skating	7.63	7.25	7.38	8.88	4.00	4.25	4.50	4.63	2.88	3.50	54.875	17
Figure Skating	6.38	5.25	6.63	5.13	6.88	8.25	4.88	4.00	3.13	4.25	54.750	19
Cycling: Distance	9.63	6.38	6.25	5.13	3.75	2.63	5.88	6.88	3.00	4.88	54.375	20
Volleyball	5.13	4.88	6.63	5.00	7.00	5.13	2.88	4.63	7.25	5.88	54.375	20
Racquetball/Squash	6.13	3.75	5.00	5.50	7.25	5.88	2.38	2.88	8.38	6.50	53.625	22
Surfing	4.63	5.00	4.13	4.25	6.63	5.50	8.25	5.50	4.38	4.88	53.125	23
Fencing	4.63	3.75	4.25	5.13	6.13	5.63	4.88	4.25	7.25	6.88	52.750	24
Skiling: Freestyle	4.13	5.13	4.88	5.13	6.63	6.88	6.63	5.13	4.13	3.88	52.500	25
Team Handball	4.88	3.88	5.38	5.50	6.00	4.50	3.00	3.88	7.88	5.88	50.750	26
Cycling: Sprints	4.25	6.13	7.88	7.50	4.00	2.88	4.75	4.50	3.63	4.50	50.000	27
Bobsledding/Luge	3.50	5.50	6.50	6.75	4.13	3.25	7.75	3.50	4.13	4.25	49.250	28
Ski Jumping	3.50	4.50	5.75	4.63	4.00	5.00	9.00	4.63	4.38	3.50	48.875	29
Badminton	5.25	3.25	4.00	5.63	7.38	5.25	1.25	2.63	7.25	6.13	48.000	30
SPORT	END	STR	PWR	SPD	AGI	FLX	NER	DUR	HAN	ANA	TOTAL	RANK
Skiling: Nordic	9.00	5.75	4.38	5.13	4.00	4.00	2.75	5.50	3.63	3.88	48.000	30
Auto Racing	5.88	3.50	2.63	1.63	2.75	1.75	9.88	4.38	8.00	7.50	47.875	32
Track and Field: High Jump	3.00	6.00	7.00	6.13	5.63	6.63	3.50	3.50	3.50	2.88	47.750	33
Track and Field: Long, Triple jumps	4.00	5.63	7.13	6.75	5.00	5.75	2.75	3.25	4.00	3.13	47.375	34
Diving	2.88	5.13	4.63	3.00	3.50	8.50	8.38	5.00	3.00	3.00	47.000	35
Swimming (all strokes): Distance	9.25	5.25	4.63	5.50	3.63	5.50	2.63	4.63	2.88	3.00	46.875	36
Skateboarding	4.13	3.75	3.75	4.13	6.13	5.13	6.50	5.25	4.88	3.13	46.750	37
Track and Field: Sprints	3.50	5.13	7.25	9.88	4.63	5.13	2.00	4.13	2.63	2.38	46.625	38
Rowing	8.13	7.75	7.13	4.00	2.50	4.00	1.75	4.38	2.88	3.63	46.125	39
Rodeo: Calf Roping	3.13	5.38	5.00	4.25	5.63	3.88	4.88	3.75	6.38	3.75	46.000	40
Track and Field: Distance	9.63	5.25	3.75	6.00	3.25	4.38	2.00	5.75	1.88	4.13	46.000	40
Rodeo: Bull/Bareback/Bronc Riding	3.25	5.38	4.00	1.75	3.63	4.25	9.50	7.38	3.63	3.13	45.875	42
Track and Field: Middle Distance	6.00	5.13	5.13	7.75	4.00	4.88	2.00	4.75	2.13	3.75	45.500	43
Weight-Lifting	4.13	9.25	9.75	2.63	2.50	3.38	4.00	4.75	2.25	2.38	45.000	44
Swimming (all strokes): Sprints	4.13	5.25	6.25	7.88	3.63	5.50	2.50	3.25	2.75	3.00	44.125	45
SPORT	END	STR	PWR	SPD	AGI	FLX	NER	DUR	HAN	ANA	TOTAL	RANK
Water Skiling	4.63	5.00	4.50	3.00	4.25	4.75	5.88	4.63	4.13	3.25	44.000	46
Table Tennis	3.50	2.50	4.63	4.13	5.88	4.25	1.38	1.88	8.88	6.00	43.000	47
Track and Field: Weights	3.25	7.88	9.13	3.00	3.13	3.00	2.25	3.63	4.00	2.88	42.125	48
Canoe/Kayak	6.75	5.25	5.63	3.50	2.75	3.88	3.63	3.25	3.13	4.25	42.000	49
Horse Racing	4.00	3.88	2.88	1.38	2.88	3.75	8.00	4.50	3.88	6.50	41.625	50
Golf	3.25	3.88	6.13	1.63	1.75	4.00	2.50	2.38	6.00	6.38	37.875	51
Cheerleading	3.63	3.63	3.38	2.25	4.13	7.50	3.63	3.38	2.50	2.25	36.250	52
Roller Skating	4.75	3.38	4.00	5.13	4.00	3.50	2.63	3.38	2.88	2.63	36.250	52
Equestrian	3.38	3.25	1.75	1.25	2.50	2.88	6.00	2.75	2.88	5.13	31.750	54
Archery	2.88	4.50	3.13	1.13	1.63	2.63	2.75	2.13	6.63	3.25	30.625	55
Curling	2.25	2.63	2.50	1.50	2.25	2.63	1.75	1.50	4.88	5.63	27.500	56
Bowling	2.25	2.75	3.38	1.00	1.88	2.38	1.63	1.25	4.75	4.13	25.375	57
Shooting	2.25	2.50	1.38	0.88	1.13	1.75	2.38	1.88	6.75	4.00	24.875	58
Billiards	1.00	1.00	1.75	0.75	1.00	2.63	1.63	0.75	5.25	5.75	21.500	59
Fishing	1.38	1.63	1.25	0.63	1.50	1.13	0.88	0.88	2.38	2.88	14.500	60

Key

ENDURANCE: The ability to continue to perform a skill or action for long periods of time. Example: Lance Armstrong

STRENGTH: The ability to produce force. Example: NFL linebackers.

POWER: The ability to produce strength in the shortest possible time. Example: Barry Bonds.

SPEED: The ability to move quickly. Example: Marlon Jones, Maurice Green.

AGILITY: The ability to change direction quickly. Example: Derek Jeter, Mia Hamm.

FLEXIBILITY: The ability to stretch the joints across a large range of motion. Example: Gymnasts, divers.

NERVE: The ability to overcome fear. Example: High-board divers, race-car drivers, ski jumpers.

DURABILITY: The ability to withstand physical punishment over a long period of time. Example: NBA/NHL players.

HAND-EYE COORDINATION: The ability to react quickly to sensory perception. Example: A hitter reacting to a breaking pitch; a drag racer timing acceleration to the green light.

ANALYTIC APTITUDE: The ability to evaluate and react appropriately to strategic situations. Example: Joe Montana reading a defense; basketball point guard on a fast break.