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Elation Lighting Powers Historic UFC Freedom 250 at the White House

Proteus delivers key light and aerial impact for the televised fight card, while Paragon and Proteus team up to illuminate the event's expansive Fan Fest on The Ellipse

When UFC Freedom 250 brought a seven-fight UFC card to the South Lawn of the White House on June 14, 2026, it created a production unlike any other in the sport's history. Staged as part of the United States' 250th-anniversary celebrations, the outdoor event placed a temporary arena against one of the USA's most iconic and recognizable backdrops.



The event extended to a massive Fan Fest on The Ellipse, where tens of thousands of fans gathered for live entertainment, ceremonial weigh-ins, and an outdoor watch party. Elation lighting played a key role in both event environments, with Tom Sutherland using [Proteus](#) fixtures for the televised fight card, while André Petrus used Proteus and [Paragon](#) fixtures to illuminate the expansive Fan Fest.

The fight card aired live on Paramount+ and reached more than 170 countries, with approximately 4,000 invited spectators attending on the White House lawn. Felix Lighting supplied lighting for the fight-card event, while 4Wall supplied lighting for the Fan Fest.

The “Claw”

Sutherland, CEO and designer at DX7 Design Inc., joined the project at Creative Director Jesse Blevins' request to create a lighting environment that could match the scale of the occasion while remaining respectful of its historic setting.



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At the heart of the design was a massive overhead truss structure, “the claw,” that housed the lighting gear. The claw was built around four main legs, with large X-shaped trusses spanning between them. A series of progressively smaller arch trusses filled the spaces between the legs of the X, creating a layered, symmetrical overhead structure that had to stand up visually against both the grandeur of the White House grounds and the extraordinary visual scale of the wider area.



For Sutherland, the challenge extended beyond technical requirements. The design had to deliver the energy and entertainment spectacle expected of a major UFC broadcast while ensuring that the White House remained an integral and appropriately treated part of the visual composition.

“We wanted to create something people would remember, but we also had to be very conscious and respectful of where we were,” said Sutherland. “We were working alongside architecture that bears such enormous historical significance, so regardless of what we placed in front of it, the two had to blend rather than compete. The design needed to hold its own against the scale of the setting, while the White House itself was always treated with the utmost respect. Everything we did worked back from that.”

Aerial Impact

Elation lighting played key roles in illuminating the fighting ring—the Octagon—and enhancing the structure’s visual impact. Sutherland used linear pixel fixtures along the inner and outer edges of the curves to define the structure, while 66 Elation [Proteus Excalibur](#) beam fixtures provided the aerial component. Mounted primarily along the upper X trusses, the Excaliburs projected powerful beams into the sky, with additional units positioned on top of the video screen facing The Ellipse.

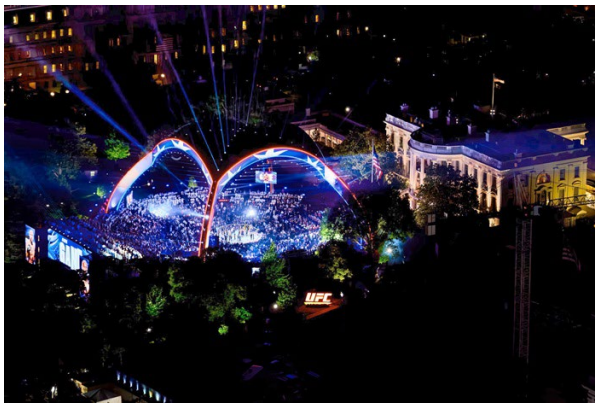
“From the very beginning, I knew the Excalibur was going to be one of the fixtures we needed,” says Sutherland. “We had to make the structure read from every angle, including all those helicopter shots, and we needed a beam that could cut through the environment and the weather.



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When we first turned them on, they were incredibly impressive, and when we started seeing images appear online from all around Washington, DC, that told me we had made the right choice.”

The Proteus Excalibur is an IP65-rated beam moving head with an ultra-narrow 0.8-degree beam, designed to produce long-throw aerial effects with the visual impact of a searchlight. Its weather protection was particularly important for a production that required fixtures to remain exposed outdoors for an extended period.



Maximus Puts the Fight in the Spotlight

While the Excaliburs gave the production its aerial scale, 60 Elation [Proteus Maximus](#) moving heads provided the primary key lighting for the Octagon.

Mounted above the fighting area on the claws curved sections, the 50,000-lumen Maximus fixtures were focused downward to create consistent illumination across the Octagon. Lighting the fighting area presented a significant challenge, as the fencing surrounding the Octagon could easily create unwanted shadows.

“The Octagon is a surprisingly difficult thing to light because of the fencing,” Sutherland explains. “We had to think very carefully about how to light it from the inside out and how to use the framing to shape the light without creating shadows. At the same time, the fixtures were mounted so high that we needed a lot of intensity.”

Beyond the Octagon itself, the lighting design extended into the White House grounds. Each fighter made an extended walk to the arena beginning inside the White House, with some walks lasting approximately five minutes. The production therefore required lighting to extend through the architecture and along the routes used by the fighters and their entourages.

While pleased with how the project came together, Sutherland also knew a production of such a unique nature at the White House was likely become a memorable part of its history. “For me, this was very much a once-in-a-lifetime experience. This is imagery that will be seen and remembered for a very long time, and that was always at the forefront of my mind.”



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The Ellipse Fan Fest

While the UFC fight card took place on the White House South Lawn, a second large-scale event took place immediately to the south on The Ellipse. The June 13–14 Fan Fest gave the much larger general audience an opportunity to experience the event through athlete appearances, live entertainment, weigh-ins, and a large outdoor watch party.



On Saturday, June 13, weigh-ins took place on the Ellipse, followed by a Zac Brown Band concert. On Sunday, June 14, the Fan Fest continued, culminating in a huge outdoor watch party where tens of thousands of fans followed the fights simultaneously on giant viewing screens.

Lighting Designer André Petrus designed the lighting for the entire Fan Fest site, including the stage used for the weigh-ins and the Zac Brown Band performance. To create an immersive fan experience with an outdoor festival atmosphere, Petrus designed the site so the audience was part of the action.

“The scale of the site meant we needed lighting everywhere, and everything had to be IP rated,” he said. “Safety was my first priority, and stylization and the stage were a close second. The concept for the fan zone was to surround the entire site with 40’ tall ladders dressed in lighting and with lighting on top. We wanted the fans to feel like they were within the UFC experience as opposed to just watching it.”

With a site more than 1,000 feet wide, Petrus distributed fixtures throughout the fan zone, with weather protection being a fundamental requirement. His Elation package included 152 [Proteus](#)



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[Maximus](#) for large-scale site wash lighting, along with 26 [Proteus Lucius](#) to illuminate signage throughout the site. Eight Maximus fixtures were mounted on each of 18 40-foot site lighting towers, with fourteen of those positioned around the perimeter of The Ellipse.



Needing a powerful fixture that could maintain punch with solid color rendering, Petrus turned to Elation's 50,000-lumen [Paragon LT](#) with TruTone™ variable CRI engine. Forty-four Paragon LT profile moving heads were positioned on 60-foot key-light towers and used for stage key lighting.

"The Paragon LT was particularly useful for the key lighting, where we had 150-ft throws from those towers. The fixtures performed exactly as expected. We were able to use the Elation package across the different elements of the event, from the weigh-ins through the live performance and the watch party."

The overhead stage structure incorporated separate broadcast and musical-performance trims. "For the weigh-ins, we wanted the backdrop of the stage to be the White House, so we left the back wide open. During the Zac Brown Band performance, we closed the stage to give a different feel for the show by lowering in the upstage side of the truss to create a 'wall of light.'"

Fight Card to Fan Fest

Together, the two event environments demonstrated the versatility of Elation's IP-rated moving lights, from the high-intensity key lighting and long-throw aerial beams of the White House fight card to the extensive site coverage and stage lighting of the Fan Fest on The Ellipse.

Sutherland extends his thanks to Creative Director Jesse Blevins for bringing DX7 Design onto the project, while Petrus acknowledges Robby Kurtz and the 4Wall team for their support, as well as Blevins and programmers Dane Kick, Clay Joiner and Luke Carver.

Photos courtesy UFC Freedom 250

About Elation

At Elation, we collaborate with leading professionals in the lighting industry to help bring extraordinary experiences to life. As a designer and manufacturer of a wide range of high-performance entertainment lighting products, we're proud to be a trusted partner to top lighting



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professionals and production/rental houses around the world. Our commitment to quality, innovation, and creative solutions has made us a go-to resource in the industry. We also offer an advanced line of lighting control products through Obsidian Control Systems, and a full range of dependable specialty effects called Magmatic. Elation serves clients worldwide through offices in Los Angeles, Mexico City, Canada, and the Netherlands. We invite you to take a closer look at elationlighting.com

For more information, contact:

Elation US

6122 S. Eastern Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90040
USA
Tel: (866) 245-6726 (toll free)
Tel: 323 582-3322
sales@elationlighting.com
www.elationlighting.com

Elation EU

Junostraat 2.
6468 EW Kerkrade
The Netherlands
Tel: +31 (0)45 546 85 66
info@elationlighting.eu
www.elationlighting.eu

Elation Mexico

Av Santa Ana 30,
Parque Industrial Lerma,
Lerma, Mexico 52000
Tel: +011 52 728 282 7070
ventas@elationlighting.com
www.elationlighting.com