

Total MMA

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By Robin Jahdi

...And Chuck Liddell's supremacy of the UFC light-heavyweight division was complete.

In just over a minute and a half, what should have been 'The Iceman's toughest challenge in many a moon was senseless on the canvas, attempting to leg lock the referee. But we'll get to the main event in a little while; it topped off what was a very solid show for Zuffa.

Forrest Griffin and Stephan Bonnar had their eagerly awaited rematch to, well, one of the best UFC fights of 2005 (as opposed to 'the best fight ever'; Matt Hughes vs. Frank Trigg II was a better match, and the opening round of Randy Couture vs. Mike Van Arsdale was scintillating). This high-profile return match was their biggest fight since Griffin's last one, and... well, since Bonnar's last bout with Griffin.

Since their epoch-defining (in western MMA terms) first battle, the fight world has seen Forrest fighting increasingly dangerous opposition, and acquitting himself well all the while. He knocked out Elvis Sinosic with little trouble, as should be the case, and he came out on the losing end of a very close decision against Tito Ortiz. And let's face it; Ortiz is pretty clearly a top three light-heavyweight in the company.

Meanwhile, the floppy-haired Golden Gloves veteran had been keeping busy in less stellar company. While his wins (including the skilled Sam Hoger and a controversial victory over 'The Ultimate Fighter Season 2's Keith Jardine) were certainly very respectable, the loss he was coming off was against Rashad Evans. Again, a very good fighter, but lacking the gravity of an Ortiz on one's record.

And so it was that the pair met once more in the heat of battle. While the promotional material attempted to convince the audience that this was just as important to the two warriors as their first tilt ('see, they both just lost! Crazy!'), this match was never going to be as epic as their first. If nothing else, it's a case of lightning striking twice (the pair closest to having two classic fights is probably Caol Uno vs. Rumina Sato in 1999 and 2000).

As this writer predicted in the Total MMA issue 16, the difference in experience between the two fighters made itself obvious from the outset. Griffin, now 'Mr. Pay-Per-View', commanded the centre of the Octagon from the outset, throwing his strikes with composure and authority.

While the fight didn't ever look close to an early stoppage, there was no doubt that Griffin was in charge. A visibly marked and flustered Bonnar once more gave his all, but Griffin showed in this fight that he is now on a (slightly) higher level than his fellow 'TUF' alumnus.



Chuck 'The Iceman' Liddell Defeated Renato 'Babalu' Sobral At UFC 62 On Saturday

For Griffin, this means a title shot is one step closer (after Liddell's theoretical fights with Ortiz and Silva), but he would need to improve as much as he has, again, in order to pose a sufficient threat to the champion. His stand-up is similar in style, but seems to have less impact than Liddell's. Griffin's grappling is ostensibly superior, but better wrestlers and grapplers than he have tried, and subsequently left with nothing to say.

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Meanwhile, Bonnar is at something of a crossroad in his career. Still relatively young, and with enough heart and raw talent to take him far, Stephan really needs to improve. To be sure, the loss of his mentor, the legendary Carlson Gracie, must have had an immense impact on his life, and perhaps that influenced his performance.

Whatever the case, I certainly hope that he can rebound and improve, as the MMA world needs more classy and eloquent fighters like Bonnar. Besides, we wouldn't want a potential Griffin-Bonnar series to end up like the eventually terrifying Silva-Sakuraba feud.

Nick Diaz returned to winning ways on this

show, in what was the fight of the night. It's not clear what was wrong with Josh Neer on this particular evening, as he was not as convincing as he had been in fights with Joe Stevenson and Melvin Guillard.

The fight was essentially Diaz peppering Neer with close, unorthodox punches, to very little in the way of response. Neer was trying for the big shots to end the match, but was unsuccessful, thanks to the quick movement and clever combination strikes of crafty veteran Diaz.

By the third round, and after Diaz had managed a pair of takedowns, Neer attempted a guillotine. Grappling specialist Diaz did not seem in to much trouble, and it was in this period of the fight that he regained the offensive and went for a kimura. When Neer refused to tap, Diaz stepped over Josh, wrenching the arm into a very painful position, leading to the submission that, as soon as Diaz had the arm, seemed inevitable.

Another entertaining three-rounder came in the form of the lightweight battle between experienced Hermes Franca and Jamie Varner, who was debuting for the promotion. The less celebrated Varner certainly made a name for himself in this fight, despite losing.

He displayed superior aggression, takedowns and striking in the first ten minutes, but Franca's experience shone through as he decided to make his mark in the final five minutes. One such mark came with a knee that stunned Varner, who ran off as a result. He was penalised by referee John McCarthy for this, but there was concern that Hermes' momentum might have been lost.

ALSO: 'THE VOICE OF PRIDE' MAURO RANALLO ON WHY TITLES SHOULD ALWAYS BE ON THE LINE, BUSHIDO 12 REVIEW

No such worry for the green-haired veteran as, in similar style to Diaz, he secured a late arm bar for the hard-fought submission victory. On the evidence of this bout, we should expect to see more from both fighters in the coming months.

Elsewhere on the pay-per-view, Cheick Kongo and Wilson Gouveia both impressed. The former out-struck Christian Wellisch and found victory via a couple of knees, while Gouveia beat Wes Combs both standing and on the ground, securing victory via an easy rear choke. Fights against tougher opposition for both men are an exciting prospect indeed.

And before we forget, some fighter named Chuck was on the show. Not the most well rounded fighter in the sport, Liddell is the master of playing to his strengths and avoiding his weaknesses; he just hasn't been fighting particularly often. Sobral, on the other hand, has taken on all comers, including one-night tournament wins, on his way to a ten-fight win streak.

Since signing with the Gracie Barra combat team, Sobral has really become a rounded competitor, with a killer instinct to match. On paper, this would be Liddell's biggest challenge since UFC 52 - the second of his fights with Couture. Of course, that fight was easier for Liddell than expected, and so it was that history would repeat.

'Babalu' and Liddell spent the first minute of the match passing the time; a quick, searching push kick emanating from Sobral like a bat's sonar, then a slack leg kick was loosed. Liddell, all the while, was patrolling his own little perimeter in the centre of the Octagon, arms by his sides like chicken wings.

Then the frenzy. Sobral staggered Chuck with a decent overhand right, and then seemed to panic, as his dream of attaining gold suddenly seemed real. The Brazilian started blindly throwing inconsequential shots, while a brace of punches granted Liddell the chance to back into space.

As Sobral gave chase, throwing punches all the while (and this was no efficient Belfort-Silva battering), Liddell was able to regain his faculties and send an overhand right and right uppercut to floor 'Babalu' who ended up on all fours.

Sobral fought his way back to an upright position, but Liddell smelled blood and was throwing strikes like there was no tomorrow, in a scene echoing his destruction of Ortiz. All a dazed 'Babalu' could do was paw away with his left hand.

A staggered challenger fell once more to the ground, and Liddell was desperate in his attempts to end the fight. To his credit, Sobral survived a long time on instinct alone, keeping his legs active and rolling out of immediate trouble. The only problem was that his actions were merely delaying the inevitable.

Liddell, true to his fighting moniker, methodically picked his shots until, having seen enough, referee McCarthy stopped the fight, Sobral so stunned that he started rolling with the official in the mist of combat.

It's sobering, and really rather sad, to think that, after all this time, hype and preparation, Sobral fell so quickly in his title challenge. The shame is that he is a great wrestler and grappler, a good all-round fighter, but with a nemesis in the shape of Liddell.

Sobral's strategy, of forcing his will onto the match, seemed sensible enough. That he was able to strike Liddell successfully was heartening; one wonders if he might have been more successful had he been more sober of action, after making that connection.

It was as though, in the heat of the moment, and the prize closer than ever before, game plan and technique went out of the window. Rather than capitalise on a dazed champion with perhaps a takedown, he instead gave wild chase, throwing ineffective punches when that really is not his strength.

Many have faulted Sobral's strategy when, in truth, that seems not to be the issue. He was trying to employ a method that had served Quinton Jackson and Couture well, back in 2003; his composure is what seemed to be the weak link here.

Nevertheless, Liddell enjoyed yet another successful title defence, and the light-heavyweight division has done nothing to elevate itself from the competitive mire I described way back in the spring of this year.

The likely contenders (and likely victims) are still Ortiz and Griffin, with precious little on the horizon; this is why the Wanderlei Silva inter-promotional fight must have tempted Dana White so. While UFC is on a roll of unprecedented financial success, one wonders if the championship matches remain to prevent the bubble from bursting before its time.



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RESULTS:

UFC 62: Saturday, August 26, 2006: Mandalay Bay Events Center in Las Vegas

Preliminary Bouts:

Middleweight: Yushin Okami (185 lbs) defeated Alan Belcher (184 lbs) by unanimous decision after 3 Rounds.

Light-Heavyweight: Eric Schafer (205 lbs) defeated Rob MacDonald (205 lbs) by Arm triangle choke submission at 2:26 of Round 1.

Light-Heavyweight: David Heath (205 lbs) defeated Cory Walmsley (205 lbs) by Rear naked choke submission at 2:32 of Round 1

Light-Heavyweight: Wilson Gouveia (205 lbs) defeated Wes Combs (205 lbs) by Rear naked choke submission at 3:23 of Round 1.

Televised Bouts:

Lightweight Bout: Hermes Franca (155 lbs) defeated Jamie Varner (155 lbs) by Armbar submission at 3:31 of Round 3.

Heavyweight Bout: Cheick Kongo (230 lbs) defeated Christian Wellisch (231 lbs) by KO (Knee) at 2:51 of Round 1.

Welterweight: Nick Diaz (170 lbs) defeated Josh Neer (170 lbs) by kimura submission at 1:42 of Round 3.

Light-Heavyweight: Forrest Griffin (205 lbs) defeated Stephan Bonnar (204 lbs) by unanimous decision after 3 Rounds.

Light Heavyweight: Chuck Liddell (205 lbs) defeated Renato Sobral (205 lbs) by Referee stoppage (strikes) at 1:35 of Round 1.

NEWS:

The UFC have announced their two main event championship bouts for the upcoming UFC 64 'Unstoppable' show on October 14.

Rich Franklin is set to defend his UFC middleweight title against Anderson Silva and Kenny Florian will fight Sean Sherk for the vacant UFC lightweight title.

Franklin will compete for the first time since sustaining a plethora of injuries, including a broken hand, in his decision victory over David Loiseau at UFC 58 in March.

Meanwhile the lightweight championship will be on the line for the first time in over four years after it was retired following Jens Pulver's victory over B.J. Penn at UFC 35 in 2002.

The next UFC event takes place on September 23 and is headlined by Matt Hughes facing Penn. The scheduled bout between Chuck Liddell and Wanderlei Silva for November now appears to be off though, with the UFC now looking to instead sign Liddell vs. Tito Ortiz II for December.

THE BOOK ON DIEGO SANCHEZ

By Lee Casebolt

Diego Sanchez went into the inaugural edition of 'The Ultimate Fighter' as an undefeated unknown from the American Southwest.

He quickly dropped the 'unknown' tag; whether arguing with Stephan Bonnar over asparagus or absorbing power from the storms, Sanchez made for good TV. In winning his division's contract, though, he remained undefeated.

Strengths:

My favorite thing about Sanchez as a fighter is his focus. Far too many BJJ black belts or elite wrestlers pick up a little Muay Thai and suddenly decide they're kickboxers. Sanchez knows exactly what approach will win him a fight and he doesn't deviate from it. Ever.

And what he's good at is groundfighting. Diego combines some of the best aspects of a traditional wrestler and a standard BJJ fighter in a game plan that is a minor variation on BJJ 101 – takedown, establish position, finish. He grew up wrestling, so his takedowns are solid. In contrast to most BJJ fighters without a wrestling background, Sanchez will consistently change levels when entering, giving him more leverage and better structure than the 'bend over and charge' method you'll see from others. Once on the ground, he looks to improve his position instead of pounding away inefficiently from the guard. After he's established side control or a mount, he'll look to finish with slick submissions.

He's not just a grappler, though – I said *groundfighting*, and I meant it. Sanchez will more often than not set up a takedown with punches, rather than just charging in. Likewise, he softens up grounded opponents with heavy punches before passing or looking for submissions. Four of his official opponents and two of his 'exhibition' victims from 'The Ultimate Fighter' were stopped by strikes on the ground.

Unlike a traditional wrestler, Sanchez has a bottom game, too. He's shown an active guard in battles with Josh Koscheck, Nick Diaz, and most recently Karo Parisyan. He's not been shown to be a finisher from his back, but he is adept at getting back to a top or neutral position.

Sanchez's focus has other benefits, as well. I'm not privy to his workout regimen, but he must train like a maniac. He's gone three hard rounds five times, and seems nearly as strong at the end of a bout as he did at the start. His wins over both Koscheck and Parisyan can be directly credited to superior conditioning.



The only thing that exceeds Sanchez's endurance is his ego, and I mean that in the best possible way. He seems utterly convinced he's an elite welterweight, and that confidence seems to help him remain aggressive when he's in control of a fight, and keeps him from folding when he's not.

Weaknesses:

'Focused' can often be a kind way of saying 'one-dimensional'. John Alessio couldn't pull off the upset against Sanchez, but he laid out the blueprint – Diego has nothing for you if you can remain on your feet. Once his initial takedowns failed, Sanchez became progressively more desperate and sloppy in his attempt, and a more aggressive (or talented) striker than Alessio could've taken advantage.

That absence of a stand-up game is going to cost him as he moves up the ladder. Diaz and Parisyan aren't going to make you pay for blowing a takedown; Georges St. Pierre and B.J. Penn will. If he's going to be a champion lacking that dimension, Sanchez would need Matt Hughes or Koscheck level takedowns, and he doesn't have them. He's a good wrestler, not a great one. On the ground, I'm not at all convinced he's the equal of Hughes or Penn, either. These are nit-picky weaknesses to be pointing out, I grant – criticising a guy because he's not the equal of the most dominant champion this side of Fedor, or arguably the most talented fighter in the sport is setting a tough standard – but Sanchez has brought this level of expectation on himself. He thinks he's the best 170lb fighter in the world, and he's not.

Summary:

He's about fourth, by my count. Much like in the heavyweight ranks, there are three men who dominate the 170lb division – Hughes, Penn, and St. Pierre – and everyone else is trying to reach that level. Sanchez is knocking on the door, and defeating Parisyan has probably put him in line for a title shot. Against any of those three, though, I don't see him doing it. Not yet. He's too limited a fighter, and not dominant enough in his dimension. He is young, though, and has time to improve. Diego Sanchez doesn't turn twenty-five until the end of this year, and winning a world title between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty wouldn't shock me.

UK TV:

Here are the listings for MMA and boxing on UK TV next week:

Saturday 2nd

- Player: 9-10 PM: UFC 54 Highlights
- ITV: 9.35-11.35 PM: Boxing: The Big Fight Live - Clinton Woods vs. Glen Johnson and Amir Khan
- Bravo: 10-11 PM: UFC 62 Highlights
- TWC: 11-12 AM: Cage Warriors

Sunday 3rd

- Player: 9-10 PM: UFC 54 Highlights
- Bravo: 10-11 AM: UFC 'The Ultimate Fighter 4 - The Comeback'

Monday 4th

- All In Sport: 4-5 PM: IFC
- All In Sport: 11.30-12.30 AM: IFC Uncut

Tuesday 5th

- Five: 1.05-1.55 AM: Kickboxing
- Five: 1.55-2.45 AM: Boxing - Fight Of The Week
- Five: 2.45-3.35 AM: Boxing Classic
- All In Sport: 4-5 PM and 11.30-12.30 AM: IFC

Wednesday 23rd

- All In Sport: 4-5 PM and 11.30-12.30 AM: IFC
- Eurosport: 11-12 AM: Boxing Classics

Thursday 7th

- All In Sport: 4-5 PM and 11.30-12.30 AM: IFC
- Player: 9-10 PM: UFC 56 Highlights
- Eurosport: 11-12.30 AM: Fight Club

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THE STARS OF TOMORROW, TODAY

By Stash Capar

It is definitely an exciting time to be an MMA fan. With PRIDE invading America, the UFC heading overseas and the rising popularity of promotions like the IFL, WFA, Cage Rage and others, both fans and fighters have a load of MMA options.

Recently I've become very interested in smaller local promotions, and not because they usually have hotter ring girls and lower pay-per-view prices, but rather because they are the breeding grounds for tomorrow's stars. In no particular order I present to you a list of North American and British fighters to keep your eye on. My criteria is very simple, they have to be relatively young, have an official record under ten fights, and never have fought in any of the first tier organisations.

1) Name: Chris Horodecki
Weight Class: Lightweight (155 lbs)
Association: Team Tompkins
Country: Canada
Record: 5 - 0 - 0
Organisations: IFL, TKO

The first time I met Chris Horodecki I mistook him for the local gym-rat. Although he seemed like a nice guy he wasn't particularly athletic or intimidating and I couldn't help but think that he just wasn't fighter material. But after seeing him in action I immediately realized how wrong I was.

This just turned 19-year-old, proclaimed by Bas Rutten as "the next one to watch out for" already holds a 5-0-0 professional record, with all five wins coming from KO or TKO, including two spectacular head kicks – the last one against Erik Owings at the June 3rd IFL show in New Jersey.

Like his teammates Sam Stout and Mark Hominick (who is rumored to have signed to fight 'The Ultimate Fighter's Season 3 winner Joe Stevenson), Horodecki fights at lightweight, but unlike his technical, collected comrades, his tiny schoolboy frame is full of barely controlled aggression, like a 9mm pistol loaded with mini Halley's comets. The last time I saw this kind of skill, aggression, power and potential in such a young fighter was when a 19-year-old Vitor Belfort took the UFC by storm many years ago. I assure you, Horodecki is definitely a name you will be hearing in the near future.

2) Name: Zelig Galesic
Weight Class: Middleweight (185 lbs)
Association: Team Trojan Freefighters
Country: England
Record: 4 - 1 - 0
Organisations: Cage Rage, Ultimate Combat

Zelig was simply born to be a fighter. He has all the natural gifts and the work ethic, the only problem was that for many years he didn't have the means to match his potential. Born in Pula, Croatia, this top prospect now trains with Team Trojan in Cheltenham and with Mirko 'Cro Cop' himself whenever he goes back home.

Flashy, powerful and always exciting, Galesic is sure to please crowds wherever he fights,



Tyson Griffin - Set To Fight At UFC 63

but don't start thinking that he's just there to bang, his armbars on Curtis Stout in Cage Rage 17 was so quick I actually needed to watch it frame by frame.

There are rumors that Galesic will soon be heading over to Japan, if that's true then MMA fans will know his name much sooner than I had anticipated.

3) Name: Tyson Griffin
Weight Class: Super-Lightweight (145 lbs)
Association: No-Cal Fighting Alliance
Country: USA
Record: 7 - 0 - 0
Organisations: Strikeforce, GC, Other

People were telling me about Tyson Griffin a while ago, but I paid no attention simple because he fought in the Gladiator Challenge events which often took place in horrible casinos full of slot machine obsessed old ladies. Then I heard he destroyed Urijah Faber and my attitude towards him changed completely.

Recently Griffin defeated Duane 'Bang' Ludwig in a Strikeforce show, and in spectacular fashion may I add. There's lots in store for Tyson, it's just too bad that the UFC doesn't really have a suitable weight class for him. However, if he manages to go up to lightweight I have a feeling we've got a champion in the making.

4) Name: Chris Clements
Weight Class: Welterweight (170 lbs)
Association: Team Tompkins
Country: Canada
Record: 2 - 1 - 0
Organisations: TKO, Extreme Combat

Here's another impressive Team Tompkins fighter. In his TKO debut he knocked out his opponent in three seconds, setting a record for the fastest KO in MMA history (stealing the record from under 'Kid' Yamamoto's feet). Clements punching power is simply unbelievable and the scary part is that he's only been training for a few years - yet another Canadian boy to keep your eye on.

5) Name: Claude Patrick Weight
Class: Middleweight (185 lbs)
Association: Tristar
Country: Canada
Record: 5 - 1 - 0
Organisations: King of the Cage, APEX

Claude does one thing with his time: train. He was not impressive at all when he started his

MMA career, but he just kept working at it. Every time he experienced a setback he would disappear and train with a new crew, and when he returned he would be twice as good. Currently Patrick is training at Tristar Gym in Montreal with the likes of Georges St. Pierre and David Loiseau, although he is thinking of heading over to Holland to improve his stand-up. I have no doubt that he will return a deadly striker.

Patrick recently signed to Carlos Newton's new IFL Team, the Toronto Dragons, for those of you who haven't seen him in action; you'll soon get your chance.

6) Name: Ronnie Mann
Weight Class: Lightweight (155 lbs)
Association: Team Trojan Freefighters
Country: England
Record: 6 - 0 - 1
Organisations: Various, including Cage Rage

Ronnie is the self described baby of the Team Trojan Freefighters. At 19-years-of-age Mann has had 7 official fights, winning 5 of them by submission in the first round. I see Ronnie as the grappler version of Chris Horodecki. When I was over at Team Trojan I witnessed a Jiu-Jitsu rolling session between Mann and James 'The Colossus' Thompson (and you thought you had seen it all after that Genki Sudo and 'Butterbean' fight). Ronnie was so quick that Thompson simply couldn't get a hold of him, and before he knew it Ronnie was on his back, chocking him out. Quick, agile and flexible, give this kid a few years and he'll be a big name.

7) Name: Nathan Diaz
Weight Class: Lightweight (155 lbs)
Association: Cesar Gracie Jiu-Jitsu
Country: USA
Record: 5 - 1 - 0
Organisations: WEC, Strikeforce

Yes, Nathan is indeed the younger brother of UFC star Nick Diaz. Is he similar to him? Yes and no. He definitely shares the same supercharged stand-up style; however his main motivation seems to be to pull off the win at all costs as opposed to create an entertaining fight. I've heard rumors that little Diaz has a bit of an attitude problem, but for now that is just speculation. Many expect him to surpass his brother, I guess we'll just have to wait and see.

8) Name: Erik Apple
Weight Class: Middleweight (185 lbs)
Association: Ruas Vale Tudo
Country: USA
Record: 8 - 0 - 0
Organisations: Gladiator Challenge, King Of The Cage, Total Combat

Erik Apple's face may be familiar to some, that's probably because he's often in Renato 'Babalu' Sobral's corner (and trains with the legendary Marco Ruas himself). This guy is nothing short of amazing, he always comes ready to fight and always finishes. Although he has been competing since 2003, Apple has been taking his time, slowly building himself up by fighting in smaller shows and staying injury free. Expect to see him in King Of The Cage more often, and from there, who knows?

REVIEW: THE ULTIMATE FIGHTER 4

By Michael Farrow

It's episode two of 'The Comeback'. Step two on the road to the road to a comeback but, for one man, he is already a star.

Of course, the early conclusion in this series is that every episode will feature a show-stealing performance from 'Mr International' Shonie Carter. First of all, we have 'Humble Shonie'. Shonie's win is the team's win. It's Matt Serra's win, it's Chris Lytle's win, it's Scott Smith's win. Shonie gives the team and Matt their due, they pulled together.

However, we're not waving goodbye to fighters this year. Dana White, not wanting a repeat of last season, is keeping guys around as they may need them in case of injuries. Smart idea, plus you have the tension of having to live with a guy who you've just fought.

One thing that always goes badly in any pugilistic-based game show is one team sitting down and thinking they can pick their fights and dominate the show. However, as it's obligatory to do it, Team Mojo duly obliges.

However, as is usually the case, something immediately happens to give the game away. Shonie writes it all in his journal and leaves it out for all to see. Forget that, Shonie has a journal?! You know what would rock more than Shonie's journal? A rhinestone-covered Livejournal, where I can read what's on a playa's mind. Where I can read stories littered with both swearing and long words. It'd be like my Livejournal only better and far more interesting.

We met Charles McCarthy this week. McCarthy seems a wee bit gormless and reminded me of an old friend, so I hereby christen him 'Lightning Charlie'. 'Lightning' seemed concerned about his weight so, as you would do, he and his team, Team No Love take the day off. Team Mojo work their arses off and, already, there's a marked disparity in the training.

So, now we reach the point where Shonie not only steals the show but the whole series, with his Singing Telegram-esque fight announcement. 'Lightning Charlie' was called and then told it's not him but he's so dumb, he didn't realise he was told it wasn't him. Gideon Ray was called, Edwin Dewees likewise and that's our match - the grappler vs. the striker.

The real genius of this series is rather than make unknown names known fighters, it takes known but possibly damaged names and reinvents them as marketable fighters. That may sound a little like the poetry of Donald Rumsfeld but it made absolute sense when I saw them rationalise away Ray's two first-round losses in UFC. These guys aren't portrayed as bad fighters. They're shown as flawed, in a bad situation or having underestimated their opponents. So many of us, and when I say us I probably mean you, look at a record and use that as conclusive proof that a fighter will lose to another fighter, not thinking about things like weight limits or circumstances leading up to a fight. Yeah, not me, definitely you. I don't do that anymore.



The Ultimate Fighting Championships Reality Television Show Has Returned

So, some random thoughts about the fight. Matt Serra just won't stop yelling "HAMMERFIST, ELBOW! WHY WON'T ANYBODY THINK OF THE HAMMERFIST, ELBOW!" It's the poor, neglected cherub to which nobody pays attention. Other poor neglected cherubs are "BREATHE! YOU'RE IN NO RUSH! and HOLD THE POSITION!" Matt Serra - just thinking of the basics, brother.

Yes, your eyes didn't deceive you, Dewees virtually cut himself. Ray can call it a vicious elbow but it's going to look vicious in isolation with a sound effect but, at the time and even looking at it again, it looked like Dewees threw an elbow and his head went into Ray's flailing elbow. Dewees' energy and desire just ebbed

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Damn, there is no justice in the world. De Wees deserves to be hitting the showers or getting stitched up and he's got another round.

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away for the rest of the round, though Ray didn't really get on him and be as dominating as he should have been.

So, all is said and done, I'm convinced the match is an easy Dewees win and the judges declare the match a draw? A DRAW?! Dewees controls round one from the top and bottom, it could be a 10-8. The second round is more difficult to call but this is one of those times where falling on your arse and wearing a crimson mask seems to make more of an impression on the judges than dominating the majority of the round. Damn, there is no justice in the world. Dewees deserves to be hitting the showers or getting stitched up and he's got another round.

The sudden victory stanza comprises of Dewees dominating for four minutes of the round but not really finishing the fight. He gets the duke, he deserved it after two rounds, he more than deserved it after three.

Alas, at least Ray was right to promise blood.

OPINION:

By Stuart Millard

Losers stay in the house: A fantastic idea that'll bring a lot of posturing and tension, although I hear there was a deleted scene of Rich Clementi absent-mindedly leaving a single roller skate at the top of the stairs.

Antics: In season one, we had people pissing on beds and punching through glass doors, in season four we have fighters reading each other's diaries. Presumably the next series will feature jacked up brawlers playing spin the bottle and having tickle fights in their jammies.

Edwin Dewees: Phonetically, he's a constantly urinating man, visually he doesn't look old enough to go to the bathroom without being accompanied by a parent.

Team No Love: In deciding to take the day off, instead of spending the time lazing around at home sleeping or wanking, inexplicably they went to the gym anyway, and just lay around on the floor like a bunch of homeless bag ladies. It was like how school kids behave when a teacher doesn't show up for the lesson, until the biggest bully magnet goes off and gets one.

Gideon Ray: His name sounds like that of a long forgotten blaxploitation superhero preacher from a 1970's Marvel comic, infused with the jive talking power of the holy bible, and an afro the size of the moon.

The Fight: Matt Serra did his first grade teacher-esque cornering again, although it was appropriate this time, what with Dewees being all of six years old. Team No Love should rename themselves Team No Advice. Their jumbled, directionless mass of unfocussed white noise failed to be heard over the NY hardcore band style yelling of Serra. Blood makes everything more interesting, especially fights, and by the end of round two, Dewees looked like Chris Leben, while the canvas resembled something Jackson Pollock shat out whilst in the throes of an epileptic seizure.

Shonie Carter: His operatic announcement of the fight was the highlight of the season so far. I love him and demand he gives me pimp lessons.

PREVIEW: MILLER VS. LAWLER

By Lee Casebolt

It's been put together, put off, put back, and now they're finally putting it on. Icon middleweight champion 'Ruthless' Robbie Lawler takes on top contender Jason 'Mayhem' Miller Saturday in Honolulu, Hawaii. Naturally, Total MMA has your preview.

The bout was originally scheduled for February 18 of this year, and if you were disappointed by the delay, you can lay the blame squarely on the shoulders of Jason Miller. He was arrested in December 2005 on charges of burglary and assault in a matter concerning an ex-girlfriend.

The aptly-named 'Mayhem' was found not guilty of criminal charges, but ICON Sports, the promotional company Miller is contracted to, suspended him for five months for the incident.

Miller claims he's gotten his life in better order since the incident, and one hopes this is true for the sake of both his career and his life as a whole.

If your MMA viewing is limited to the larger PPV companies, you've probably not seen a lot of Miller, and that's a shame. He's an aggressive submission grappler who looks to entertain on his way to a finish, in the mould of a Kazushi Sakuraba or Genki Sudo. The similarities start as early as the walk down to the ring; Miller's Hannibal Lecter-inspired entrance is one of my favourites. Miller is a constant threat to his opponent's consciousness, with ten of his sixteen wins (overall record, 16-4) coming by way of choke.

But who's he beaten? Here's a few guys you may have heard of. No one has defeated new Pride star Denis Kang in three and a half years, since Miller choked him out. 'Mayhem' retired Egan Inoue, and choked out 'The Ultimate Fighter' star Lodune Sincaid and UFC veterans Ronald Jhun and Falaniko Vitale. Going in at an emaciated 170lbs, he took Georges St. Pierre to a decision in Miller's only UFC appearance, displaying amazing defensive skills, flexibility, and toughness. Long story short, you do not want to be on the mat with Jason Miller.

The good news for Miller is that this fight is at 185 lbs, his ideal weight class. Mayhem has fought as low as 170 lbs, as well as at 205 lbs and even heavyweight, with varying degrees of success, but middleweight is his home. The bad news is that he faces a man some have called the hardest hitting middleweight in the world.

And what about the champion? Robbie Lawler dropped under the radar of most MMA fans after suffering a submission loss to Evan Tanner in late 2004. Lawler then took nine months off, healing up a variety of injuries, before returning to the ring. He knocked out Falaniko Vitale to win the Icon middleweight title, the first taste of gold for the young prospect.

"Young prospect"? Yep. It's easy to forget that, despite his 11-3 record and seven UFC appearances that Lawler is just 24-years-old. In his five year career, he's already been considered a can't-miss superstar-in-training, a washed-up has-been, and now a champion.



Jason 'Mayhem' Miller Will Fight Robbie Lawler In Hawaii (C) www.mayhemmiller.com

After taking the title, Lawler signed a lucrative, five-fight contract with ICON, reportedly worth as much as \$200,000. Kind of puts that 'The Ultimate Fighter' deal in perspective, doesn't it? Training with the elite Miletich camp in Bettendorf, Iowa, Lawler is something of an anomaly on the team. The stereotypical Miletich fighter is an average to above average athlete with a range of impeccable technical skills and sound tactical sense. Lawler, by contrast, is a physical freak of a brawler. He wades in with both hands flying, looking for the highlight-reel KO. In fairness, he's got a very nice highlight reel to show for it, but losses to Pete Spratt and Nick Diaz show how vulnerable he can be to a more technically sound striker who can avoid the maelstrom while delivering their own punishment.

Diaz said of Lawler "He thinks he's better than he is," and he may be right. For reasons known only to him, Lawler never tried to take the limited Pete Spratt to the ground, and paid for it. He

had trouble cutting off the cage against the lankier Diaz. He fell right into the guard of Tanner, succumbing to a triangle choke shortly thereafter. With the exception of Tanner, these are not championship-calibre opponents, and someone of Lawler's talents shouldn't be losing in that fashion.

Pat Miletich says Lawler is "more mature" since his UFC loss, and he appears to be more focused. He recently earned his first submission win, in between his two knockouts of Falaniko Vitale, which may be a sign of an expanding skill set. If he has truly made the progress his trainer claims, I like him as the favourite in this contest. He's more physically gifted than Miller, and has a higher level of regular training partners. If his mental game ever reaches his level of athletic talent, Lawler has unlimited potential.

If not, Miller may leave him laying choked unconscious on a mat in Hawaii.

PRIDE BUSHIDO TWELVE REVIEW

By Jordan Breen

<http://completevaletudoaccess.blogspot.com>

Dream Stage Entertainment brought what looked to be a rock solid line-up on paper to Nagoya's Rainbow Hall for their August 26th Bushido card.

Compelling debutees, the Bushido aces, and the Grand Prix quarter-finals marked the thick fourteen bout line-up. However, fights will forever happen in the ring, and we have seen all too often that a star-studded line-up may not actually produce outstanding results, and living up to the hype the card garnered from fans would be an uphill battle from the get-go.

Before the twelve fight main card, Bushido played host to two challenge matches. Two returning Bushido veterans, Daisuke Nakamura and Seichi Ikemoto, put on a quick but entertaining grappling bout. Both men moved at a high pace on the mat, as the long time GCM Demolition veteran Nakamura gained the upperhand on the Real Rhythm star Ikemoto, locking up a deep armbar. Ikemoto winced and writhed on the floor, but Nakamura extended the arm even further, forcing Ikemoto submit, and giving Nakamura his third win in a row.

In the second challenge bout, hometown Nagoya fighter Naoki Matsushita made his Bushido debut against well-travelled veteran Hiroyuki Abe. Both men fought cautiously over the course of the ten minute contest and seemed afraid to overextend in case of making a critical mistake. The conservative pawing and air-punching was not particularly effective for either combatant, as they found out that fighting not to lose doesn't work in a Bushido Challenge bout. With no judges and an automatic time limit draw, the relatively offenseless fight was winnerless after the two five minute rounds.

Perhaps the finest aspect of the twelfth instalment of Bushido was the series of debuts kicking off the main card. Nagoya native Hatsu Hioki brought another hometown face to the show, and looked strong in his bout with Jeff Curran. Typically two 65 kilogram fighters, a contest between Curran and Hioki at their more natural weight would easily be a top ten clash. The lanky Hioki showed a necessary diversity in his game; usually a slick jiu-jitsu player looking to catch his opponents, Hioki chose to play the stand-up game against Curran, who is known for his ground skills.

Hioki utilised his considerable reach advantage to the fullest, whipping Curran with powerful low kicks from the outside, keeping Curran out of range to score with strikes of his own. Hioki led the bout on the feet, stalking Curran and connecting with his low kicks at will, and putting together solid, albeit sparse, combinations with his hands.

Curran struggled to dominate offence on Hioki; while he was able to catch a kick



Gono (C) Dream Stage Entertainment

from the Japanese fighter late in round one and tackle Hioki to the mat, Curran was able to generate little offence from Hioki's guard, due to both Hioki's long legged guard, and the scant amount of time on the clock. After fifteen minutes, the fighter from the ALIVE Academy walked away with a unanimous decision victory, showing a maturity in his game as he used discipline striking to emerge victorious.

Another Shooto standout made his Bushido debut in the main card's second bout. Shooto world middleweight champion Shinya Aoki stepped into the PRIDE ring to face Miletich product Jason Black. While the '10th Degree Of Flying Submissions' didn't take to the air, he certainly impressed with his outstanding grappling ability.

Just moments after sucking Black into his guard, Aoki showed why he is an All Japan Brazilian jiu-jitsu champion and an ADCC Japan trials winner. Aoki snapped his legs up into triangle position, tightening his grip around Black. As Aoki punched Black with the triangle sunk in deep, it was only a matter of time until Black submitted. At just 1:58 of the first round, Aoki had made his first Bushido appearance a success.

In a match-up of two of MMA's brightest young stars, former WEC lightweight champion, and current ISKA MMA lightweight champion Gilbert Melendez made his PRIDE debut against DEEP lightweight champion Nobuhiro Obiya. It was the Cesar Gracie pupil Melendez who would assert himself, putting on one of the most impressive displays of sustained dominance in recent memory.

For fifteen minutes, Melendez showed the relentless aggression which has become the trademark of his young career. Known for his rugged wrestling and powerful punching, Obiya was whipped from bell to bell by Melendez who outwrestled and

outpunched him in brutal fashion. Melendez tackled Obiya to the mat, dominated position, knocked him down with hard hooks, and pounded him relentlessly.

Obiya was not without his own merit; despite being pounded from the opening bell, he would not bow to Melendez, continuing to attempt to mount offence until the final bell, showing an uncommon and unteachable toughness. However, after fifteen minutes, it was a foregone conclusion, as 'El Nino' took an unanimous decision in impressive fashion in his Bushido debut.

For the second Bushido in a row, the 'Ibaraki Top Team' of Tatsuya Kawajiri, Mitsuhiro Ishida and Hayato 'Mach' Sakurai competed back-to-back-to-back, and for the second Bushido in a row, the three natives of the Ibaraki prefecture went a perfect 3-0.

First it was the Shooto world champion Kawajiri, notching a quick and decisive knockout victory over Chris Brennan. While it was speculated by many that Kawajiri may be in for an easy fight, as Brennan had suffered a bite from a brown recluse spider and undergone a hasty surgery, yet chose to fight anyway, 'CRUSHER' made it even easier on himself, smashing Brennan with a hard knee in the clinch, dropping him onto the mat, and following up with punches on a prone Brennan to score the referee stoppage in only 29 seconds.

Kawajiri's T-BLOOD team-mate Mitsuhiro Ishida followed up his outstanding win over Marcus Aurelio by facing another Brazilian jiu-jitsu black belt in Chute Boxe's Cristiano Marcello. Ishida, who has met a quaint amount of stand out jiu-jitsu players, treated Marcello in much the same fashion as his other opponents. Using his dynamic and technical wrestling, Ishida took Marcello to the mat and pounded with his typically high-paced punching flurries from the guard.

While Marcello threatened late, springing to life with a seemingly miraculous, fully extended armbar, Ishida showed his trademark outstanding submission defence, escaping the hold, and resuming his top control pounding, taking a unanimous decision after fifteen minutes.

The elder statesman of the Ibaraki trio, Hayato Sakurai, was not quite as impressive as Kawajiri or Ishida, but got the job done against debuting Brazilian Luciano Azevedo.

Sakurai, who has stated that he hates fighting in the summer and would prefer not to fight in during the scorching season for the rest of his career, looked somewhat lethargic. 'Mach' landed a strong knee which temporarily stunned Azevedo, but the young Brazilian was determined, and was able to take Sakurai to the mat.



Dan Henderson Surprisingly Lost To Kazuo Misaki (C) Dream Stage Entertainment Inc.

After a stand-up put the fight back on the feet, Sakurai was able to land another knee as Azevedo looked to shoot in. The strike opened a gash inside the left eyebrow of Azevedo, and doctor's then called a halt to the bout at 4:35 of the first round, giving Sakurai the win in a relatively unremarkable bout, and allowing him to escape the discomfort of fighting in the heat of a Japanese summer.

In what has become an accepted diversion from the typical competitive calibre of Bushido events, the promotion's 'real pro-wrestler' Ikuhisa Minowa took to the ring against boxing-turned-MMA sideshow attraction Eric 'Butterbean' Esch. After a series of attempted dropkicks saw 'The Punk' end up on his back on his mat, the eccentric Minowa got top position on the massive Esch. Working from side control, Minowa was able to isolate the massive arm of 'Butterbean', before moving into position for an armbar, which mercifully ended the bout at 4:25 of the first round.

The marquee attraction of Bushido was the continuance of the 2006 Welterweight Grand Prix, but the first two quarter-final bouts offered little excitement or intrigue. First, American Top Team's Denis Kang took a considerable step in validating much of the hype which has begun to surround him as he nixed Amar Suloev quickly and clinically.

After both men felt each other out on the feet, attempting to set up combinations with kicks, Kang knocked Suloev to mat with a powerful straight which didn't quite land flush. Jumping into Suloev's guard, Kang was able to pass quickly and efficiently to the side, before taking mount. After Suloev rolled to defend himself, Kang was able to control the experienced Red Devil Sport Club member, before sinking in a rear naked choke, cruising to a submission victory and punching his ticket to the semi-finals in just over four minutes.

Brazilian Top Team's Paulo Filho worked even more hastily than Kang in his quarter-final with

Ryo Chonan. It was the inference of a myriad of experts that Filho was selected as Chonan's opponent due to the fact that Chonan sustained damage to his right orbital bone in his bout with Joey Villaseñor in June. According to speculation, Dream Stage Entertainment had thought that Filho's preference for the ground, coupled with less-than-explosive punching skills on the mat could allow Chonan for a fairer opportunity in the ring.

Filho evidently was unfazed by the punditry, as he quickly imposed his will on Chonan. Filho secured a takedown only seconds into the bout, before passing to side mount, then full mount, and locking up an armbar only 2:30 into the bout, perhaps offering some mitigation to his reputation as boring, or impotent despite his powerhouse grappling abilities.

Following another elaborate and choreographed entrance as his alterego 'DJ GOZMA', Akihiro Gono was able to use his edge in experience to outclass Armenian-born, Dutch-trained youngster Gegard Mousasi. Through the first round, Gono was able to control position the ground, passing Mousasi's guard, and asserting a dominant, if not damaging, top game. Taking the mount late in the round, Gono was unable to mount much offence as Mousasi was able to cling to him until the bell went.

Round two offered more of the same for Gono, taking down Mousasi from the clinch, and controlling top position. After securing Mousasi's back, Gono was able to smoothly transition into an armbar, rolling Mousasi over and earning the submission win at 4:24 of the second round.

In what was easily the evening's most surprising bout, Gono's GRABAKA team-mate Kazuo Misaki put on a stalwart performance against 2005 Welterweight Grand Prix champion and PRIDE welterweight champion Dan Henderson. In a re-match of their first meeting in April in which Henderson took a close and competitive decision, Misaki proved the second time was the charm, as he tweaked his gameplan

perfectly to upset the champion.

Misaki's high workrate, strike variety and quick combos frustrated Henderson for fifteen minutes, as Misaki showed the ability to avoid the powerful right hand of Henderson, which was arguably his undoing in their first bout. As Henderson sought the big punch, Misaki landed effective combinations, ducking and parrying Henderson's attack, and wearing him down with hard leg kicks and a non-stop pace. Misaki controlled the tempo of the bout, and landed the cleaner, more effective blows, and resultantly, he won a unanimous decision, changing the landscape of the Grand Prix with an unexpected upset.

The evening's finale couldn't quite match the excitement of the preceding upset, as PRIDE lightweight champion Takanori Gomi took on Shooto European middleweight champion David Baron in what amounted to a tune-up fight for the Gomi, coming off of his shocking loss to Marcus Aurelio in April.

The Bushido champion started as he usually does, hurting the French firefighter with punches on the feet, backing him up and putting him on his heels. Damaged, and thoroughly outmatched on the feet, Baron shot in to take Gomi down, but his takedown attempt was easily defended. Off of the defended shot attempt, Gomi was able to take Baron's back, which was the beginning of the end for the Frenchman.

Gomi tightened a body triangle around the midsection of Baron, controlling his back. While Baron tried ably to defend the submission, Gomi would not be denied as he locked up a rear naked choke at 7:10 of the first round, making an expectedly successful comeback to the PRIDE ring.

While Bushido had its share of excitement, the organisation and logistics of the card were perhaps somewhat of a detriment. At a whopping fourteen fights, much of the event's excitement was at the beginning of the card, as it dragged through the middle with ho-hum affairs and foregone conclusions. The intermission offered a significant period of downtime before the four Grand Prix bouts and the main event, yet the relative non-excitement and one-sidedness in the first three Grand Prix quarter-finals never allowed the show to regain any form of momentum. Even the excitement and surprise of the Misaki vs. Henderson bout was somewhat tempered by the waffling length of the card which had lost its steam some six fightsearlier.

Nonetheless, perhaps the card is best viewed based on the significance of its results, and not the long windedness and prevalent one-sidedness of the card. The twelfth edition of Bushido may not be remembered as an all-time great show, but perhaps as an important prelude to a greater climax: with potential new faces such as Aoki and Melendez, the continued success of Kawajiri, Ishida and Sakurai, the emergence of the four top Grand Prix competitors, and a pivotal title defence on the horizon for Gomi, this Bushido may not be best considered independently. In just over two months, we may see that this past Bushido was merely setting the stage for a classic when Bushido heads to the Yokohama Arena on November 5th.

LIVE ROADS: JAPAN NEWS REVIEW

By Jordan Breen

<http://completevaletudoaccess.blogspot.com>

The legal battle between Seiya Kawamata and Nippon Network Television Corporation is over, and it didn't end as anticipated.

Kawamata had filed a lawsuit in Tokyo District Court against Nippon Network Television Corporation for an annulment of payment by NTV in regards to the 'Inoki Bom-Ba-Ye' television contract in 2003. It was expected by industry insiders that Kawamata would win his lawsuit against NTV, but in a surprise turn of events, courts have ruled that Nippon TV's annulment of the contract was appropriate.

In December of 2003, Nippon Television and Kawamata agreed to a contract to produce three MMA supercards on New Year's Eve for three years, beginning in 2003. The contract stipulated that Kawamata's production company, K Confidence, would acquire 800 million yen, approximately \$7.5 million US dollars at the time, for Nippon TV's acquisition of the broadcasting and production rights of three events.

However, the 2003 'Inoki Bom-Ba-Ye' event was a notorious failure on New Year's Eve, being demolished in the television ratings by the competing PRIDE 'Otoko Matsuri' and K-1 'Dynamite!!' events. PRIDE's New Year's Eve telecast on Fuji Television grabbed a 12.5% rating, while K-1's December 31st card on Tokyo Broadcasting System took a commanding 19.5%. The 'Inoki Bom-Ba-Ye' event on Nippon TV drew a paltry 5.1% rating. After the failure of the event, NTV cancelled the contract, citing the show's failure.

Following the contract termination, Kawamata fled Japan without paying a variety of expenses, including the purses of various fighters, and went into hiding for nearly half a year. As a result, power agent Miro Mijatovic was forced to pay fighters such as Semmy Schilt, Alistair Overeem and Stefan Leko out of his own pocket. This past April, Mijatovic was awarded a complete victory in the Tokyo District Court in his civil suit against Kawamata for the unpaid earnings from 'Inoki Bom-Ba-Ye 2003'.

Kawamata's disappearance and the subsequent civil suit against him were a result of Nippon TV's annulment of their contract with Kawamata. The annulment, which resulted in a reduced payment of 200 million yen to Kawamata's K Confidence production company, resulted in Kawamata's inability to pay outstanding bills and debts incurred as a result of the massive failure of the 'Inoki-Bom-Ba-Ye' event.

The Tokyo District Court ruled today that it was legally valid and apropos for Nippon Network Television Corporation to void the deal, on account of the fact that Kawamata was unable to produce the services of the wildly popular Mirko 'Cro Cop' Filipovic for 'Inoki Bom-Ba-Ye 2003', and that the show had drawn such poor ratings.

It is at this point what the ramifications of the verdict will be, as the once powerful promoter



Kazushi Sakuraba Will Fight On Oct. 9

Kawamata's whereabouts are still currently unknown, in addition to rumors of Kawamata being in dire financial circumstances.

The executive committee of HERO'S have made some early announcements regarding their October 9th card.

As speculated, the 70 kilogram middleweight tournament semi-final bouts at Yokohama Arena will be Ivan Menjivar vs. Kaoru Uno, and Gesias 'JZ' Calvancanti vs. Rani Yahira. It was announced that the 85 kilogram light-heavyweight tournament bouts will be revealed next week.

Pertaining to the 85 kilogram tournament, doctors have cleared Kazushi Sakuraba to compete on October 9th. Following his dramatic comeback win against Lithuanian Kestutis Smirnovas in the quarterfinals in which Sakuraba was hit with a devastating assault of punches early in the bout, Sakuraba was taken to hospital to undergo an MRI. Following a follow-up MRI, physicians have determined Sakuraba has suffered no cranial or brain damage, and is fit to compete in the semi-finals on October 9th.

As a result of the controversial Sakuraba vs. Smirnovas fight, after which HERO'S director Akira Maeda stated that the bout should've been stopped after Smirnovas appeared to have knocked out Sakuraba, HERO'S have decided to add a sub-referee, as well as a designated executive at ringside with the power to stop a bout.

Also, Tanigawa told the press that Kazuyuki Miyata informally requested the HERO'S committee for a match for the upcoming show. Tanigawa added that Miyata's opponents, if he does participate, will be a foreign fighter. Miyata

has not competed since May 3rd, when his jaw was broken by a flying knee from Norifumi 'KID' Yamamoto.

Sammy Presents HERO'S 2006: Middleweight & Light Heavyweight Tournament Final - October 9th, 2006 - Yokohama Arena - Kanagawa, Japan

Tentative Fight Card (Subject To Change):

HERO'S 2006 Middleweight Tournament Semi-finals: 70 KG, 2R/1EXT 5M

Kaoru Uno (Wajyutsu Keisyukai Tokyo Headquarters) vs. Ivan Menjivar (Tristar Gym)

Gesias Calvancanti (American Top Team) vs. Rani Yahira (Ataída Jr. Jiu-Jitsu)

Also Scheduled To Participate:

Kazushi Sakuraba (Freelance)

Yoshihiro Akiyama (Freelance)

Shungo Oyama (Freelance)

Melvin Manhoef (IT'S SHOWTIME)

Dream Stage Entertainment has announced two more fights for their Openweight Grand Prix Final event being held in Tokyo on the 10th September.

Middleweight Grand Prix champion Mauricio 'Shogun' Rua is making his comeback after injuring his arm against Mark Coleman in February, taking on Cyrille 'The Snake' Diabate. Not content to wait until late October to get back in the ring when he faces Kevin Randleman in Las Vegas, Rua has decided to fight the French nak muay. Diabate is currently on a four bout winning streak in DEEP, including two stunning knockout victories over former 'Shogun' foe Yasuhito Namekawa.

The other match-up will feature the 2005 Middleweight GP runner-up Ricardo Arona from Brazilian Top Team taking on Alistair Overeem. In his last bout against Arona's teammate Antonio Rogerio Nogueira, Overeem was plagued by a neck injury, forcing his corner to throw in the towel in the second round, and will be looking for revenge against 'The Brazilian Tiger'. For Arona this is the first fight of the year and since his close split decision loss to middleweight champion Wanderlei Silva on New Year's Eve.

British fighter Paul 'Semtex' Daley made an unsuccessful debut on Japanese soil when he lost to Satoru Kitaoka at the Pancrase '2006 Blow Tour' in Yokohama.

The Roughhouse Gym combatant was made to tap out to a guillotine choke from inside his opponent's guard after 2:54 of the first round.

Daley had dominated the early stand-up exchanges through utilising punch and kick combinations and scored a vicious high kick before being forced to defend an ankle lock.

However, Kitaoka then took Daley to the mat and immediately passed to half-guard where 'Semtex' attempted an unsuccessful sweep which ended in submission. The Brit will, however, return to Pancrase in April 2007.



WHAT'S THE POINT IN TITLE BELTS IF YOU DON'T DEFEND THEM?

'Titles In Turmoil!' That would be the most suitable headline to sum up what has happened in PRIDE FIGHTING CHAMPIONSHIPS in 2006.

Following last weekend's BUSHIDO 12 event in Nagoya, Japan the PRIDE FIGHTING Lightweight and Welterweight title pictures are foggier than Paris Hilton at an Elementary school spelling bee. Kazuo Misaki found his pot of gold inside the Rainbow Hall when he was able to impose his will on defending PRIDE World Welterweight Champion Dan Henderson and pull off the latest in a string of upsets in the 'Land Of The Rising Sun'.

In a re-match of a fight Henderson won at BUSHIDO 10 in April, Misaki utilized his foot speed and crisper combinations while avoiding Henderson's sledge hammer of a right hand in eliminating the defending champ from 'Survival '06', the BUSHIDO Welterweight tournament. It was the first time that Henderson has tasted defeat at 183lbs and now either Misaki, Paulo Filho, Akihiro Gono or Denis Kang will emerge as the winner of this year's Grand Prix when the semi-finals and final take place on the same night in November.

Henderson's loss came on the heels of PRIDE World Lightweight Champion Takanori Gomi's first setback in PRIDE at BUSHIDO 10 when he was choked out by Marcus Aurelio in what was a non-title affair. Gomi's loss created a firestorm of controversy amongst fans and pundits due to the fact that he, like Henderson on Sunday, still has the gold wrapped around his waist. A lot of people, your humble columnist included, think that every bout a champion competes in should be a title fight. Otherwise, it creates the quandary PRIDE finds itself in at the moment and essentially diminishes the prestige of the belts. To wit, Aurelio, coming off the biggest victory of his career, was defeated in his very next bout by Mitsuhiro Ishida at BUSHIDO 11 putting his title aspirations in jeopardy. So who gets the title shot? Aurelio or Ishida?

In terms of what just went down in the 'Survival '06' second round, what if Misaki now loses his semi-final fight, does he or the person who beat him get the title shot at the 'American Athlete'? To further complicate things and make you feel like you are reading a Calculus text book, what if the person who beats Misaki in the final four loses the championship tilt? Does the winner of the tournament then get the title shot? Do you see why I began this column with the ominous headline? Do you need an aspirin yet?

Now, those of you who follow or used to follow pro-wrestling will note that in that



Bushido Lightweight Champion Takanori Gomi (Left) (C) Dream Stage Entertainment Inc.

pseudo sport, champions participate in myriad non-title fights to foster a rivalry with a certain opponent in hopes of building to a lucrative match when the championship bout finally comes to fruition. Of course, in that form of sports entertainment, the promoters are able to do whatever they like since the results are all pre-determined and they can 'push' whoever they feel has the most potential to get over with the fans and draw, what is the bottom line in all endeavours, the almighty dollar.

In shoot fighting, that option doesn't exist. The reasons are obvious. It's a legitimate athletic competition and due to the grueling nature of the sport, an athlete shouldn't be expected to compete more than 4-6 times a year. Taking this into consideration, a champion should only participate in title fights. It maintains the legitimacy of the championship and allows fans to become more connected to the bout knowing something of great value is on the line.

I truly believe that PRIDE has the planet's best fighters competing in the top MMA organisation in the world. With apologies to the UFC who have done an incredible job in promoting their brand and deserve all of the success that they are currently reaping, I am an advocate of the PRIDE ring and rules. That doesn't mean that PRIDE is perfect. Nothing is, right? As you may have

read elsewhere, PRIDE World Heavyweight Champion Fedor Emelianenko will once again meet Mark Coleman at PRIDE'S first show in North America, October 21st at the Thomas and Mack Center in Las Vegas. That will also be a, you guessed it, non-title match. What if the 'Hammer' does the unthinkable and vanquishes the 'Last Russian Emperor'? Shouldn't he be the champion? I guess Marcus Aurelio and Kazuo Misaki already know the answer.

I know PRIDE President Nobuyuki Sakakibara is a very smart man who knows what's best for the company and has proven it in the three years that I've been working for him. I just hope he realises that non title fights don't have a place in MMA, otherwise the beautiful and very expensive PRIDE belts aren't going to be worth the price of the one holding up my pants right now.

BY MAURO RANALLO

